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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

ONLY THEIR SKINS CHANGE:
GITKSAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE, KINSHIP, AND GENEALOGY

BY

HEATHER ANN HARRIS

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA
FALL 1994

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Only Their Skins Change: Gitksan Social Structure, Kinship and Genealogy," submitted by Heather Harris in partial fulfillment of the degree of Master of Arts.

Dr. Michael Asch, Supervisor

Dr. Ruth Gruhn

Dr. Gurston Dacks

September 9, 1994

ABSTRACT

This thesis begins with an overview of Gitksan culture as it has developed in what is now called northwestern British Columbia from the late Pleistocene-early Holocene to the present. The worldview, history, economic, political and social institutions are described.

The basis of this thesis is three years of genealogical research as well as several additional years of research into related topics and over ten years of living in the community. Considerable discussion is devoted to methodology, particularly the issues of rapport and oral versus written sources.

It is my conclusion from the research that the Gitksan make accurate statements about the nature of their society. The elders' statements about various aspects of their social structure such as houses, clans, **wilnadaahl**, adoption and cross-cousin marriage, have been contradicted by several investigators, but with thorough research, I found the elders' views of their social structure to be accurate. I will present evidence which indicates the problems in the writings of some anthropologists who have previously examined Gitksan social structure.

It is also my conclusion that most of the traditional aspects of the Gitksan kinship system and social structure are still strongly evident today including matrilineal kin reckoning and inheritance, the traditional system of rank and the authority that it entails and traditional marriage patterns such as clan exogamy, cross-cousin marriage and the levirate and sororate.

That the Gitksan social structure is thriving today in spite of the pressure put upon it since European contact, almost entirely by means of traditional adaptive mec anisms, gives evidence to the strength and flexibility of the system.

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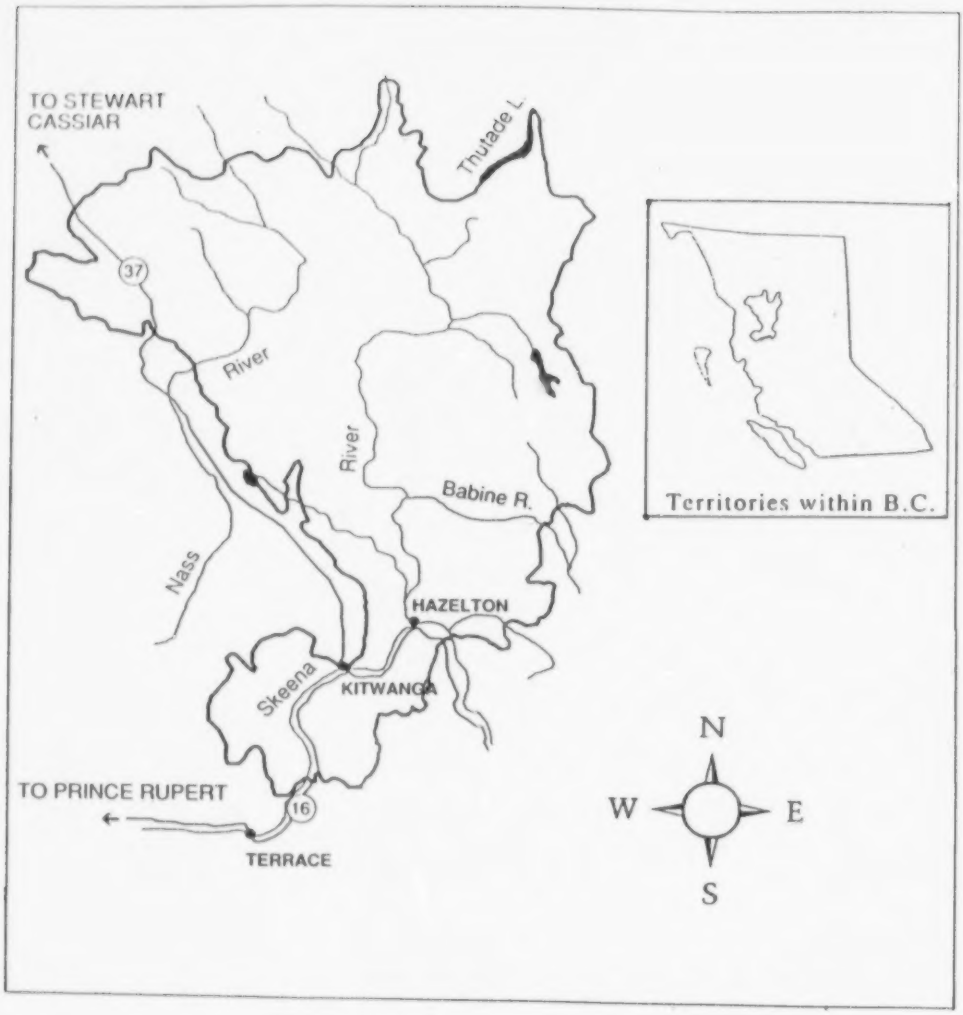


Map 1

Gitksan Territories

GITKSAN VILLAGES
Kaldo'o
Kispiox River
Kisga'ga'as
Skeena River
Babine River
Kispiox
Shegunia River
Glen Vowel
Kitwancool
Gitanmaax
Babine Lake
Skeena River
Kitwangax
Gitsegukla
1 cm = 10km
Skeena River
Bulkley River
North

Map 2

Map of the territory showing Gitksan internal boundaries.

Map 3

I Introduction

I am Metis with roots in Manitoba, but I have lived in British Columbia all my life. When I began my research I had been living in two Gitksan villages, Kispiox and Gitanmaax (Hazelton) for over two years. I was married to a Gitksan man, Xhlex, a wing chief of the House of Ts'iibasaa and Antgwulilibiksxw of the Fireweed Clan of Kispiox; and I had been adopted into a Wolf Clan house, 'Niist, of Kispiox; and had been given the name Tax'niibaxw. In the spring of 1984 I was approached by Don Ryan, who was the executive director of what was at that time called the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en Tribal Council (later the Office of the Hereditary Chiefs of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en and now the Gitksan Government Office). He asked if I would be interested in undertaking genealogical research for the Tribal Council. A few days later I had an office and an instruction which was essentially, "do genealogies." Only later would it become evident that the Gitksan would find the genealogies very valuable, useful for a greater number of purposes than had initially been envisioned. Initially, it was also unclear exactly how the genealogical research should proceed, or even what the exact purpose was.

From the outset it was known that the genealogies were important for the purpose of defining membership, for delineating who the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en were by their own reckoning. The Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en, being matrilineal in their reckoning of kinship, had never accepted the government's patrilineal band membership accounting of who was Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en and who was not. They knew they needed to record whom they considered to be their own people. The Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en had not, at that time, begun to pursue their land claim in court; but the thought was no doubt there and it was known that the case of the Bear Lake people of Ontario was denied partly because they could not prove in court that they were the descendants of the people encountered in their territory at the time of European contact. It soon became clearer why the genealogies were important. As time went by they became more and more useful. To this day they continue to be used, updated, and put to new uses.

It went without saying that the genealogies had to be matrilineal and organized by house (matrilineage), the basic social unit of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en. Because each house belongs to one of four clans, it was also self-evident that the genealogies would be organized by clan. With those aspects of the organization of the work being

obvious I wanted someone to give me a list of houses and I would fill in the individual members genealogically. It seemed simple enough; but simple only in my naivete, as will be explained in detail later.

Eventually I did nearly three years of genealogical research. For the first year and a half I worked on both the Gitksan and the Wet'suwet'en, and for the rest of the time I worked exclusively on the Gitksan. I am concerned mainly with the Gitksan in this paper.

Several months after I began the genealogical research, the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en decided to pursue a claim for title to their land in court. The research then became more focused toward that end; and I spent several months writing a report with similar contents to this one, for the court case. Eventually, in January 1989, I spent eight days on the stand testifying as what I like to call a "so-called expert witness" in Delgamuukw vs. The Queen. The reason I say I was a "so-called expert witness" is that the court called the chiefs of the Gitksan and the Wet'suwet'en the lay witnesses; and called me and the other anthropologists, historians, linguists, etcetera, the expert witnesses, when, in fact, we are just cultural translators who owe much of our "expertise" to the chiefs.

My academic training gave me a framework in which to put the information and sometimes a vocabulary to use, but the content came from the chiefs.

The research began as genealogies, but it became so much more than that. I went asking for genealogical information, but it would have been impossibly rude to insist that elders and chiefs stick to the subject. They offered me so much more information than I asked for. I recorded it all, and all of it was useful and important. The most evident information obtained besides the strictly genealogical was a detailed picture of the social structure, which makes up the main part of this paper. During my many meetings with the chiefs I also learned about oral history, the land tenure system, authority system, socialization, life cycle events, values and philosophy, and many other aspects of Gitksan life.

The main product of the research was a set of 50 Gitksan and 13 Wet'suwet'en genealogies. I worked on the Gitksan genealogies until the funding ran out, and I worked on the Wet'suwet'en genealogies until it was realized that I needed to specialize on the Gitksan. The Wet'suwet'en genealogies were handed over to others to complete. Since I stopped working on the genealogies, some additional work

has been done on them; and they are now in the process of being computerized on programs created especially for them. The set of genealogies I took into court were 50 hand-drawn house genealogies showing most of the living Gitksan, many of their ancestors, their house and clan membership, Gitksan and English names, birth and death dates, inheritance of names, marriage patterns, and other information.

The majority of the information on these genealogies came from interviews with over 200 elders, chiefs, and other house members (Appendix I). Some written records were used; but they were not nearly as useful as the information obtained from the people, because the organizing principle of the genealogies is house, and house is rarely mentioned in written records. Another reason the information obtained from the people is more valuable is that the written record does not go back nearly as far for the Gitksan as the oral record. And, on the other end of the time scale, a house member has up-to-the-minute information about births, deaths, inheritance of names, and so on that written records do not have. When I did use written records, I often found a remarkable correspondence between them and what the elders had told me. Often it became obvious that the elders were correct while the

written records were wrong.

The genealogical research demonstrates the primary principle of Gitksan kinship which is matrilineality. The kinship units, called houses, are unequivocally defined matrilineally. The house, **wilp** in the Gitksan language, is the primary grouping in Gitksan social organization. It is a corporate entity which is the owner of land and resources, fishing sites, a set of ranked names or titles, histories and the crests which denote them, songs, dances, and other property. All of these things are considered extremely valuable property with worth far beyond the economic.

Because each house belongs to a clan, a delineation of house membership also indicates clan membership. Rather than saying the clans are divided into houses, it is more accurate to say that a group of houses form a clan. Clan membership is signified by possession of the same major crest or crests, and indicates a shared history. Clans also organize some social relations such as marriage and potlatching. The Gitksan call the potlatch "the feast" when speaking in English.

The genealogical research made marriage patterns clear,

some of which I did not expect to find still existing. The genealogies demonstrated that the rule of clan exogamy is still very strong, as evident even in a brief examination of the community; but it was a surprise to find out that cross-cousin marriage and the levirate and sororate continue to be practised.

Patterns of inheritance were made explicit by the genealogies. Where the inheritance of house property is concerned, inheritance is almost exclusively matrilineal. The inheritance of chiefs' names and the concomitant authority over house members and house business and property is always within the house. The rare exception to this rule would be in the case of an extinct or virtually extinct house. It was evident from the genealogies that inheritance of chiefs' names is most often from a man to his sister's son; but with the population decline and social pressures put on the Gitksan in the last one hundred years the incidence of uncle to nephew inheritance has declined. Regardless, inheritance is still within the house except on the rare occasion when that is very difficult or impossible. For some names I was able to document inheritance for six generations, and for up to 200 years.

The genealogies demonstrate the pattern of adoption into houses, not to be confused with the raising of a child by someone other than the birth parents. This a very important difference which has caused misunderstanding on the part of other writers. Adoption into a house is called **ts'imilguudit** by the Gitksan, while the raising of a child by someone other than the birth parents is called **sihlguxhlxwst**. The genealogies show that adoption of new house members is not a common occurrence. It was also found during the genealogical research that there are two main types of **ts'imilguudit**. The first is what I have called strategic adoption, to bolster a low house population. The second type is to give a non-Gitksan a place in Gitksan society. The majority of the second type of adoptees are the spouses of Gitksan. Some adoptions, including mine, fit both categories.

Another type of information which came to light during the genealogical research, especially when it was hard to clarify house membership, concerned the amalgamation and division of houses. With the population decline during the period of epidemics, which lasted from the proto-historic period until the 1930s or 1940s, houses with low memeberships were sometimes forced to amalgamate, to survive biologically and to protect their house property.

In ancient times, when houses were populous and wealthy, they sometimes divided and became more than one house. Now, with rising numbers of people, the pressure to divide houses or reconstitute what were formerly separate houses is again on. This is a very recent trend made possible again by the renewed health and vigour of the Gitksan population.

The influence of the kinship system in Gitksan life is still very powerful today, and is actually moving towards becoming even more powerful again. It has always been very important, but there was a certain effect felt from the enormous pressure put on the Gitksan to abandon matrilineality and all that it entails by missionaries, the Department of Indian Affairs, teachers, and social workers. Those pressures are still active, but there is renewed interest by young people in the traditional social structure. The genealogies have actually contributed to that renewed interest; and are being used by community members for many educational, social, and political purposes.

Without an understanding of kinship one cannot understand much of what the Gitksan do; and I found that the more I learned, the more I could learn. What I mean by this is

that once I learned the house membership and clan relationships of most of the people I saw, everyday life became a learning experience. I began to see the great extent to which kinship organizes everyday interactions; not just formal interactions such as marriage and feasting, but ordinary things such as why a certain person babysits someone else's children, or whom one calls when they need help, or with whom one goes fishing. Even such small matters are usually organized by kinship for the Gitksan.

From the genealogical data I have collected and from the interviews with Gitksan elders, it is my conclusion that the Gitksan make accurate statements about their social structure.. Previous investigators (for example: Adams 1973, Cove 1982, Barbeau 1929) have contradicted what Gitksan elders say about houses, clans, **wilnadaahl**, and other aspects of their social structure, but I have found, upon thorough investigation, that the elders make accurate statements. It is my conclusion that: Gitksan houses are biological, matrilineal kin groups; that Gitksan marriage rules include clan exogamy, preferential cross-cousin marriage and the practice of the levirate and sororate; that inheritance is, virutally without exception matrilineal; that house-owned property of all kinds is inviolable except in rare and precisely circumscribed

incidents; and that the existance of houses as entities is maintained through adoption of members and through amalgamation with related houses.

II The Gitksan, Their Land and Culture

1. Location

The territory of the Gitksan lies along the Skeena River and its tributaries in what is now northwestern British Columbia (see Map 1). It is geographically quite remote from the major population centres of British Columbia and the rest of Canada - it is over 800 road miles from Vancouver and nearly as far from Edmonton. There are six Gitksan villages, some with populations exceeding 1,000. Road access to the territory is by Highway 16 from Prince George, nearly 300 miles east. Highway 37, an unpaved road to Alaska, runs through the territory. All other roads are unpaved secondary roads and logging roads. The CN rail line also runs through the territory, along the Skeena, adjacent to Highway 16. The nearest airport is in Smithers, 40 miles from Hazelton.

The southern boundary of Gitksan territory is not too far south of the Skeena River, running from a few miles east of Hazelton to about 40 miles west of Kitwangax. The bulk of the territory runs more than 100 miles north of the Skeena to its headwaters, the headwaters of the Nass River, and

along the Skeena's major tributaries, the Babine, Kitwancool, and Kispiox Rivers.

2. The Environment

The territory of the Gitksan is unique in that three of the six major ecological zones found in Canada meet in Gitksan territory. In the southern and western part of the territory is the west coast ecological zone. In the east the country is interior cordilleran in type; and in the north, it is subarctic. This variety results in a bountiful land with a wide variety of resources. Although no Gitksan territory borders on the ocean, it is close; and the Gitksan have always had access to marine resources, either directly or through trade.

The most striking geographical features of Gitksan territory are the rivers and mountains. The Skeena River gives the people their name: "Git" means "people" and "Xsan" is the name of the river. Because "Git" already means "people" it is redundant to say "Gitksan people", and this expression is mildly frowned upon by the Gitksan as a mistake of the ignorant.

The Xsan is the second biggest river on the west coast of British Columbia. It is a deep, swiftly flowing, dangerous, life-giving, life-taking river. As the bearer of millions of salmon each year it is life-giving, but few people who enter those waters ever surface again. It is a river which must be respected. Every spring during high water, it triples its already enormous volume; and has at times wiped out whole communities. The Babine and Kispiox Rivers may be tributaries of the Skeena; but they are major rivers in their own right with scores of tributaries of their own, draining thousands of miles of territory.

The mountains in Gitksan territory are majestic. They cover the territory in almost its entirety. Looming above Hazelton, rising to over 8,000 feet is Stekyoodenhlxw, which the white people call Roche De Boule. This mountain figures in Gitksan histories which are known far beyond their territory. This is where the mountain goats' revenge, of which Barbeau and many others have written, took place. Near Kitwangax are the Seven Sisters, just as majestic and just as historically significant as Stekyoodenhlxw.

3. The Communities

The Gitksan today number around 5,000, which they believe is probably below their pre-European contact population. Some live out of the territory, but the majority live in the villages. They currently live in six villages along the upper Skeena River and its tributaries (see Map 2). All of these villages are traditional villages of precontact origin, except Glen Vowel, a mission village which originated in 1898. The most westerly village is Kitwangax, which is on the north bank of the Skeena about 160 miles upriver from Prince Rupert on the coast. Kitwancool is the only current permanently inhabited Gitksan village which is not on the Skeena. It is located about fifteen miles north of Kitwangax on the Kitwancool River. Gitsegukla is about twenty miles upriver from Kitwangax on the south bank of the Skeena. Another twenty miles upstream, Gitanmaax lies at the confluence of the Skeena and Bulkley Rivers. Glen Vowel is about eight miles upriver from Gitanmaax; and Kispiox is about two miles beyond Glen Vowel where the Kispiox River meets the Skeena. Earlier in this century two other Gitksan villages were still inhabited year round. Those villages are Kisga'ga'as, about fifty miles up the Skeena from Gitanmaax, and Kuldo'o, about eight miles past Kisga'ga'as.

Kisga'ga'as is used actively on a seasonal basis for fishing, hunting, and trapping. Kuldo'o is less frequently used, since it can only be reached on foot. A project which will be undertaken this summer (1994) will make Kuldo'o accessible by foot horse or snowmobile (Jeffrey 1994).

The main commercial centre in Gitksan territory is Hazelton, a village of 340, completely surrounded by Gitanmaax village. The population of Hazelton is approximately half native and half non-native. New Hazelton is the largest non-native community in the territory, with a population of about 1,500. There is a non-native community near Kitwangax which is known as the Kitwangax Valley. Most of the rest of the non-native population living in Gitksan territory are scattered along the main highways in isolated homesteads or small hamlets.

4. The People, Their Language and Relatives

The Gitksan are often called Ts'imsian by anthropologists. They do not really appreciate this term, but are not greatly offended because they recognize their relationship with the Ts'imsian. Along with the Nisga'a, they speak the

same language as the Ts'imsian; but they are a distinct people. The three major dialects of the Ts'imsian language, **sim algyax** (true language), are mutually intelligible. The Gitksan dialect is called **Gitxsanimx**.

The Gitksan may be related only to the Ts'imsian and Nisga'a linguistically; but their oral histories indicate that they are related biologically, through a complex history of migrations, to all the other west coast peoples from the central coast north as well as many of the adjacent Dene peoples. The oral histories trace connections with the Wet'suwet'en, Tahltan, Ts'ets'a'ut, Haida, Tlingit, Kitamaat, some Kwakiutl groups, the Sekani, and others. I will discuss these relationships in more detail later in this paper.

5. Gitksan Culture and Economy

The Gitksan are culturally a west coast people, but they are the most inland representative of the west coast culture area. Their neighbours on their eastern border, the Wet'suwet'en, are a Dene people. Unlike the other Ts'imsian-speaking peoples, the Gitksan have no direct access to the sea. They relied more heavily on inland

resources than their coastal neighbours, but there was a very active, and once very competative, trade in coastal resources from very early times which continues to this day. Commonly, today and in the past, the Gitksan are granted permission by the Ts'imsian, Nisga'a, or Kitamaat to harvest sea foods in their waters.

The primary food resource for the Gitksan, both today and in the past, was salmon. In the summer, beginning with spring salmon, the various species of salmon, ascend the Skeena and its tributaries in enormous numbers. The springs are closely followed by the sockeye, pink and later coho, which can run right until November. In winter the steelhead, which is a salmon with a seasonal cycle which is the reverse of the other species, is fished through the ice. The main salmon fishing season, though, is summer. Both today and in the past, it is July and August when Gitksan families are most likely to be found on the rivers, camped at their house-owned fishing sites, catching and preserving fish for the winter (Morrell 1985:20). Trout and other lake fish continue to be part of the Gitksan diet.

Moose is the most important source of meat for the Gitksan today, but that was not always so. Moose have only become

common in Gitksan territory in the last one hundred years. They may have been found in the territory before the Little Ice Age, and moved back into the territory (Daly 1988:347). Before that, mountain goat, deer, bear, beaver, porcupine, and rabbits were the main sources of meat. In the northern part of Gitksan territory, caribou were hunted. All of these animals continue to be eaten today.

The most common vegetable food in the traditional Gitksan diet was berries. Many types were consumed, including saskatoons, soapberries, Alaska blueberries, dwarf blueberries, black huckleberries, high bush cranberries, oval-leafed blueberries, and red huckleberries (Haeussler 1987:2) Some other types of vegetable foods were used as well, such as the wild celery and pine cambium (Gottesfeld 1992:149; People of 'Ksan 1980).

Traditionally the Gitksan carried on a very active trade with their coastal neighbours, the Ts'imsian, Nisga'a, and Kitamaat, in seafoods such as clams, halibut, abalone, seaweed, sea lion, and seal. The Gitksan sometimes traded for eulachan grease, and sometimes went to the Nass River themselves to produce the oil. There was an extensive network of trails throughout the northwest that connected the Gitksan and their neighbours (MacDonald and Cove

1987:X). The trails leading from the eulachan fishing grounds were known as the "Grease Trails". Trade throughout the northwest, especially along the Skeena, was an important locus of power for the chiefs of the northwest nations.

Today, the Gitksan continue to use many of the foods used in pre-contact times, with the addition of purchased foods or vegetables and fruits grown in their own gardens.

The Gitksan once used a very large variety of medicinal plants for the maintenance of health and healing of illness. Today that repertoire is much diminished, but continues to be important. Some medicinal plants such as devil's club, juniper, Indian hellebore, water lily root, balsam bark, and spruce pitch are still commonly used (Gottesfeld and Anderson 1988; Gottesfeld 1992:152; Harris 1993, 1994).

The forests of the house territories are heavily used for wood products. Nearly all Gitksan use wood for heating their homes, so firewood is taken in volume. Fence posts, poles for smokehouse and shed frames, and cedar for roofing in either shakes or bark sheets (Gottesfeld 1992:153) are other wood products used. In the past, a very large part

of the material culture of the Gitksan was made of wood, particularly cedar (Daly 1988:331). The plank houses, storage boxes, cooking vessels, baby cradles, masks, totem poles (Hebda and Mathewes 1984:711) and many other products were made of cedar (Stewart 1984). Gitksan canoes were made of cottonwood, bows and arrows of yew, fish traps (Morrell 1985:20) and sweatlodge frames of willow, and bowls of alder. Gitksan artists continue to carve totem poles, masks, bowls, plaques, and other items from cedar and occasional other woods.

Material culture also involved the extensive use of stone and bone as well as wood products (Albright and Burnard-Hogarth 1987; Ames 1979). One of the most remarkable groups of stone artifacts ever found on the northwest coast was a cache of 35 stone war clubs in Gitksan territory at Hagwilget canyon (Duff 1975:116; Fladmark 1986:71). As well as having deadly utilitarian value, these clubs are works of art of a high order.

Recently there has been a revival of trapping in Gitksan territory. Trapping furbearers for the manufacture of clothing and for trade with coastal peoples had been an important part of the pre-contact economy for the Gitksan. With the arrival of Europeans, furs increased in importance

as a trade item. They continued to be an important part of the Gitksan economy until the 1950s, when the price of furs plummeted. At that time, logging companies were moving into Gitksan territory, clear cutting large areas, ruining trapping on many house territories. During that decade, many Gitksan gave up trapping. During the 1980s fur prices were on the rise again, and Gitksan began going back to trapping. Today, fur prices are still respectable; and with the renewed interest of young people in getting out on to the land, trapping as an economic pursuit and a way of life is reviving.

6. The Potlatch

No doubt, the most widely known institution of the Gitksan is the potlatch. When speaking in English, the Gitksan call it "the feast". In their own language, a smaller event, to which mainly village residents are invited, is called **li'liget**; and a larger event to which people from many villages are invited is called **yuukxw**.

The feast remains an essential institution for the Gitksan, held after every death from the death of a great chief to the death of a stillborn baby. In addition to funeral

feasts, there are feasts to raise headstones, grave fences, and totem poles; and to put on a new chief's robe. Feasts are not uncommonly held to wipe off shame. Occasionally marriage and divorce feasts are still held. In the past they were held when a baby was a few days old and received its first name, when young people reached puberty, and to mark any important event in the life of an individual. Both today and in the past, feasts are held on the occasion of momentous events for the community, and to cement peace between nations.

The majority of feasts mark an important event in the life of an individual and his or her family. The most common type of feast held today is the funeral feast. At a funeral feast, the event is staged by the members of the clan of the deceased. His or her house members are the main actors, especially the heir. Contributions to the feast are made in accordance with the rank of each contributor, and the closeness of his or her relationship to the main actor. The members of the other clans will be the guests, and witness the business which is undertaken. At the funeral feast for a chief, for example, his or her name will be passed to an heir within the house. The heir's previously held name will be passed on to a younger house member, and other names may be given out as well.

The most significant business which actually occurs at the feast is the passing down of responsibility for the house property; the land and fishing sites which provide the family with resources, and the **adaa'ox** (family-owned oral histories), crests, songs and other property which confirm the family's ownership of the land.

7. Gitksan World View and Spirituality

In the Gitksan worldview, everything has power. All people, animals, plants, elements, "supernatural" beings, have power. This power is held in lesser or greater degrees by all. It is a uniting force which makes all part of the natural world. People are part of the natural world, rather than greater than it, and beings not of the ordinary world, which Westerners might call "supernatural", are also part of the natural world but just have more power than most of us (Harris 1993, 1994a).

The power that people have is called **daxgyet**. It can be increased by living a clean, healthy living; and by **si'setxw**, which is composed of a cluster of methods of increasing power through purification. **Si'setxw** includes such practices as bathing, fasting, praying, sweatlodges,

practising sexual continence, using medicinal plants internally or using them to smudge one's self or possessions. People who have qualitatively more power than most, gained from a **laxnox** (supernatural being), are said to be **halait** (Guedon 1984a, 1984b). When a Gitksan person today refers to a **"halait"**, they are usually referring to a shaman; but a shaman is more properly a **halaid'm swanasxw**. Chiefs with **laxnox** names (spirit power names), and "secret society" or dancing society members are also **halait**. The last of the Gitksan **halaid'm swanasxw** were said to be women who died in Kispiox in the 1960s. The "secret societies" no longer exist, but chiefs who are **halait** are common (Harris 1994a).

There has been a revived interest in traditional medicine and spirituality among young Gitksan in recent years. Part of the impetus came from the movement to recover from addictions and other kinds of dysfunctions (Harris 1993:59). Further impetus is now coming from a program initiated in 1993 by the Gitksan to take over health care services for their people. There is even some discussion about reviving the tradition of the **halaid'm swanasxw** (Jeffrey 1993).

The Gitksan believe very strongly in reincarnation. Nearly

every Gitksan knows who he was in his last life, sometimes for two or more generations. Reincarnation is usually within the house. When it is outside of the house it is always to another kind of relative. There are many ways in which the returning person is recognized including dreams by a pregnant woman or her relatives telling who the new baby will be, birthmarks which match scars or marks of the former person, memories in young children, and affinities in young children for relatives or friends of the former personality (Mills 1994). The old person may even predict the kind of person they will come back as. A person who was "good" (Johnson:1985) may come back in more than one person at a time. The Gitksan see each family as having a stock of souls which go around and around, taking on new flesh with each generation. As Alfred Joseph said, "Only our skins change" (1984).

Because of the firm belief in reincarnation, the Gitksan see life as cyclical in nature, past, present, and future are not entirely distinct. A new baby born in the house is seen very much to be a continuation of the past and continuity into the future.

8. Socialization and Life Cycle

During the genealogical research, I gathered much information regarding socialization and life cycle. After the genealogical research was finished, for a year I researched Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en socialization, life cycle, authority systems, values, spirituality, and related topics. During this time I had the opportunity to bring together the information I had gathered on this topic. The following section is an extremely brief synopsis of the report which was written from that research, **Children Are Our Future** (Harris 1989).

Traditionally, the Gitksan lived in large cedar plank houses which stood in rows facing the river in villages which endured for centuries. Most people would spend part of the year away from the village at fishing sites, berry grounds, and hunting grounds; but most of the year was spent in the village. Each kinship unit owned a dwelling in the village, where most male house members would live with their wives and children. Because of the avunculocal post-marital residence rule, children were usually raised surrounded by their patrilineal relatives, although close ties would be maintained with their own house.

Whether raised by patrilineal or matrilineal relatives, children were raised with love, patience, and understanding. They were taught by example and never physically punished, although their upbringing was disciplined and firm. It was believed that indulging a child was endangering its future. The children of chiefs were especially expected to learn the rules of proper behaviour.

The socialization was usually effective, and relations within the family and community were usually harmonious. When deviant behaviour in children or adults did occur, it was the responsibility of the entire house to suffer the consequences. Most transgressions were dealt with by compensation by the house of the offender to the house of the victim. A person deemed irredeemable might be killed, possibly by his own family. Another alternative for very serious crimes was ostracism. Murder, incest, and trespass were usually the only crimes considered serious enough to be dealt with by ostracization or execution. These crimes were considered so serious because they upset the social order and threatened the very existance of houses; murder violates the sanctity of life and robs a house of a loved and valuable member, incest breaks down the social order of reciprocating exogamous clans and trespassers are assumed

to be there to steal resources from a carefully managed territory which could threaten the existance of the legitimate owners of the land.

When children were young, lessons were usually gentle and responsibilities few; but as time passed, both increased. At puberty, all children, but girls especially, went through an intense period of training to prepare them for adult life. Girls would spend a year in puberty seclusion, learning what would be expected of them as women. Boys, especially those of high rank, would leave their fathers' houses to "return" to their maternal uncle to complete their education, and to take their position in their own house. Several years would pass after puberty before the young person would marry. Marriages were arranged by families with people of similar rank. The young people had a considerable amount of say in whom they would marry.

All adults had their role in life depending on their rank and special skills. Most men were hunters and fishers; most women were fishers and plant gatherers. The sex roles in traditional Gitksan society were not rigid. Men could gather plants and preserve fish, and women could do some hunting. Both men and women could be involved in the special occupation of the **halait**; but midwives were always

women and warriors were always men, so far as I know. Nearly everyone gained respect with age. Most would eventually receive a ranked name and those born of high rank would receive several, each higher than the previous one as the years passed. Anyone who never received a ranked name was either **wa'aiyin** (lazy) or **maamst** ("half-crazy") (Johnson 1985). Elders were treated with great care and respect. When they became too feeble to walk, they were carried on peoples' backs in bentwood boxes.

At death, an individual's father's house would make all the funeral arrangements and be repaid by the deceased's house members at the funeral feast. Death was seen as another stage of life, as the soul of the deceased awaited rebirth in a newborn house member.

9. History

The knowledge the Gitksan have of their history, retained through memory, in the form of **adaa'ox**, oral histories, is so remarkable that most Westerners, from anthropologists to judges, deny the possibility that any people could remember that much information that accurately for that long. In fact, archaeological and paleoenvironmental evidence is

beginning to indicate that the Gitksan and related peoples of the northwest do remember events which occurred in the late Pleistocene and early Holocene (Harris 1994a; Marsden 1987; Gottesfeld and Gottesfeld 1986; Mathewes 1987). The Gitksan maintain the accuracy of the **adaa'ox** by repeated private and public tellings at which witnesses can correct any inaccuracies.

The Gitksan see the **adaa'ox** as the exclusive property of those families involved in the events recorded in them. A very ancient **adaa'ox** may be shared by many families; a recent one may belong to only one family. No one Gitksan elder can tell the history of all the Gitksan because he or she has the right only to tell the **adaa'ox** which belong to his or her family. The total story of Gitksan history can only be known by hearing the **adaa'ox** of all Gitksan houses. The picture which emerges is a complicated story of origins and migrations, of catastrophic geological and social events, of smaller events important only to individual houses. A compilation of the **adaa'ox** paints the picture of the development of Gitksan social organization and territorial ownership as we know it today. (1)

In the briefest of outlines I will describe Gitksan history. The most ancient remembered ancestors of the

Gitksan were matrilineal Raven Clan and Wolf Clan people who came into the northwest by an inland route from the north. They settled at Laxwiiyip in a treeless, early post-glacial environment in what is now the thickly forested land of the Tahltan. At Laxwiiyip they spoke a Dene language. Sometime later they were joined by people who came upriver from the coast with the forebearer of the Ts'imsian language, and with a social system based on small kinship units and permanent village sites with exclusively owned territories. The marriage of the two systems created the house and clan system that the Gitksan and other northwest peoples have today.

After the two major initial groups merged, there were some new arrivals from outside the northwest, and many migrations within the area. These early people spread throughout the area, claiming empty land as it became available as the glaciers receded, the glacial lakes drained, and sea levels stabilized. They often settled in canyon locations, where their villages can still be found today. At some time fairly early in this history, Eagle Clan people from what is now Tlingit territory entered the historical picture of the ancestral Gitksan. Sometime not too long after that, the only clan which originated in the area began. That was the Fireweed (Killerwhale) Clan.

Possibly by 7,000 B.P., the Gitksan had established the town of T'xemlaxa'mid, a large community just south of where Hazelton is now, where the people lived in large numbers in peace and prosperity for millennia (Barbeau 1928). It was possibly a downturn in the climate around 4,000 B.P. that ended T'xemlaxa'mid (Ryder 1987:1294; Ritchie, et al 1983:127; Osborn and Luckman 1988:120-121). After that the people separated, spreading throughout the area and forming most of the villages in which they reside today.

The last thousand years or so were a time of considerable culture change in the area. Trade throughout the region became more important, and with it came increased warfare. It was also at this time that the two highest ranking Ts'imsian houses began consolidating their power, developing a social system which approached a class system. Although the Gitksan did not leave behind the system of rank, the near-class system of the Ts'imsian impacted them and other peoples of the northwest because the Ts'imsian had the power to affect trade and make war.

Then, about 300 years ago, strangers began to appear on the northeast borders of Gitksan territory, people who had been displaced by the northward and eastward movement of

indigenous peoples across the continent by the arrival of Europeans in the east. By the 1770s Europeans arrived on the coast, and the maritime fur trade began. By that time, if not earlier, epidemic diseases began to devastate the Gitksan (Boyd 1985, Brody 1987:96; Harris 1992). By 1824 a fur trade post was established just northeast of Gitksan territory, and the Gitksan became involved in the land-based fur trade. By the 1860s, Europeans began to enter Gitksan territory in search of minerals; and by the 1880s traders, settlers, and missionaries had entered Yip Gitksan. By that time the balance of power had irrevocably turned in favour of the newcomers.

Each one of these important events and a myriad of others is enshrined in the Gitksan **adaa'ox**. Many of these events are also remembered through the medium of crests, **aiyukwxs**. The **aiyukwxs** are the exclusive property of the house or houses involved in the events; and will be displayed on chiefs' robes, crest (totem) poles, house front paintings, and other items to confirm the family's history and its connection to its land. The most important historical events are related to the house ownership of territory. The ownership of land by a house is made manifest in **adaa'ox**, **aiyuukxws**, **wams simooget** (chief's names), **limx oo'iiy** (ancient songs), dances, and other means. The

crests, songs, and dances which appear to be art in Gitksan culture are, in their opinion, economy (in that they confirm ownership of resource-producing property) with its attendant spiritual aspect.

III Methodology

Methodology is an important part of this work because differences in methodology probably lead to the disparity of opinion on the nature of Gitksan social structure between other writers and myself.

I began the research in May of 1984, and worked full time on it for about three years. I began armed with my education in anthropology: I had taken a course wholly concerned with kinship, and many courses pertaining to West Coast cultures. I had also learned something about Gitksan culture from living among them for a few years. Being married to a Gitksan chief, living in Kispiox village, being an adopted member of the Wolf clan, and very active in the feast (potlatch) system all helped to smooth the way for my research. This was obvious when I interviewed people from other villages who did not know me; and they asked me, "Who are you?, meaning, "How are you related to me?" To be able to describe my relationship in kinship terms was helpful.

1. Research Methods

Most of the first three months of my work was spent reviewing the research which had been done before. One large research project had been undertaken by the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en a few years before which was useful to me. This project resulted in documents generally called the Cultural Research Files. This was a broadly defined project undertaken by Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en who had gone to Carleton University for intense training in research methods. The objective of the project was to preserve the knowledge of the elders who have unique information, and were elderly and not expected to be in this world much longer. Most of the people interviewed are no longer living. Most of the interviews were conducted in the language of the people, and were carefully translated. These documents were full of a wide range of information, including much information concerning genealogy and social structure. I spent weeks sorting out this information which was useful to my research.

Some of the original group of researchers who worked on the cultural research files were still employed by the Tribal Council when I began working. These were Gitksan elders: Marie Wilson of the Kitsegukla Fireweed house of Guxsan;

and Violet Smith, Pista'ii, of the Kispiox Fireweed house of Dawamuux; and Wet'suwet'en chief, Alfred Joseph, Gisdaywa. They were very helpful, answering the many questions that arose while I reviewed the existing information in the Tribal Council's library.

I appreciate all of the help I received from them, but I am especially indebted to Alfred Joseph for one story he told me. At the time it seemed to be rather irrelevant and unconnected to anything in particular, but I realize now how important it was to me in broadening my perspective. Alfred told me a story about a woman living in Hagwilget who took her granddaughter to Kitwancool, to visit relatives. When they arrived in Kitwancool the grandmother introduced the girl to a man sitting outside a house. The man was so old he was bent over double, and walked with two canes. The girl's grandmother said that the old man was her grandfather. The great great grandfather took them inside to meet his mother. The great great great grandmother was so old that as she lay under her blanket she barely made a bump because she was so withered away. She could not even hold her head up on her own, and had a carved chin rest so that she could hold her head up and look at people when she talked to them. Her mind was still clear even at her very great age. Alfred figured the great

great great grandmother was 150 years old.

When I heard this story I could not believe it but I could not deny it either; it was very compelling. That someone could live to be 150 years old went against everything I had ever heard, especially without the benefits of modern medical science. But the story was told with too much sincerity and conviction to not be believed. I was soon convinced of the truth of the story when genealogies (and even the Catholic church records for the Wet'suwet'en) began to reveal many Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en lived well past 100 years until recently. The most important thing about this story for me was that I could not hold tightly to all of my previously held beliefs. I started to realize that there were things in the world that I had not previously believed possible.

In addition to the other researchers at the Tribal Council and the Cultural Research Files, another source of information which was helpful to me was the work that Niel John Sterritt, from the Kispiox Fireweed house of Gitluudaahlxw, had done on documenting names and seating at feasts. Preliminary work had also been done by Glen Williams, from the Kitwancool Wolf house of Malii, and other Gitksan researchers on listing houses and clans.

Beginning with these sources of information, I created a set of files, one for each house, which were further organized by clan. As I obtained more information I would file it in the appropriate house file.

I had figured out by now that no one could give me a perfect and complete list of houses for which I could just fill in the genealogical information. I knew that Gitksan society has a nice logical organization in which everyone belongs to a house and every house belongs to a clan, so in my linear Western thinking (I may be Metis but I was largely raised and educated in the white world), I thought it should be simple to get a list and fill it in. I did not understand that although the logic of house and clan organization is simple, houses are living things. Over time houses change and grow, they amalgamate and divide, they have history. That is why when I would try to ask what I thought was a simple question, a list of houses belonging to a certain clan, I got different answers from different people. In some cases different people would call the same house by different names. They would do that because a house is called by the name of the highest chief of the house; and in some houses there will be two chiefs of equal rank, so the house can be called by either name. Sometimes the house will be called by one name today but a

different name 50 years ago because of changes in rank since that time. In other cases there would be confusion (on my part) because a house that was now one was an amalgamation of three houses 100 years ago, so the house might be called by two or all three of those original house names.

After three months of work, mainly in the office with the records, I went out into the villages, armed with my confused house list, to do interviews. Something I had learned early on was to be humble, to know how little I knew. I went out assuming I was going to make a lot of mistakes and ask a lot of stupid questions. Knowing that, I thought the best way to proceed was with people I was related to who would tolerate my ignorance, and they did with humour and patience. It is hard to explain how seriously the Gitksan take this kind of research; but it is not taken at all lightly because as an oral culture, what is spoken becomes the permanent record, so people do not want to tell you things of which they are unsure. Also, many parts of Gitksan knowledge are the private property of the house, including their history. It is property of inestimable value because it validates their ownership of their land and resources and everything that makes up their society, since every bit of cultural knowledge can be

recorded in a complete cycle of **adaa'ox̲**.

In spite of their fear of mistakes being made in the recording of their stories, the elders were often very happy to have the information written down because it is not being passed down orally as it once was. Many elders expressed regret that their children and grandchildren did not spend time with them and listen to them the way they had with their grandparents.

I began interviewing my husband's relatives, especially his aunt, Mary Johnson, Antgwulilibiksxw of the house of Antgwulilibiksxw and Ts'iibasaa. I was fortunate to be close to such a knowledgeable lady who was so able to express herself in English. She is an amazing genealogist, with information on her own house members going back about 200 years; and information about virtually every house in our village, Kispiox, and in the neighbouring villages as well. She has a remarkably accurate memory which goes back to when she was as young as three in 1909. The accuracy of dates Mary gave me was confirmed over and over again by the written records and other elders. The value of Mary's knowledge was also confirmed by the number of elders from other houses who said, "That is all I know about it but Mary Johnson knows more." I went back to Mary many times,

spending hundreds of hours with her.

That I spent so much time with Mary Johnson does not at all mean that I got all or even a large percentage of my information from her. I interviewed over 200 Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en, mostly elders and some middle-aged, and occasionally young people as well.

I began my research with Mary Johnson and other relatives because I hoped to learn first from those who would be most tolerant of my mistakes. Initially, in the interviews with relatives, and when I began branching out to other houses, I would start with the chief of each house; but I soon realized that was not necessarily the best way to begin the genealogical research. The chiefs are most often men, and I found that the keepers of genealogical information are most often women, so I changed my strategy. I also found that it is difficult to get a lot of information from an elder who struggles with English; and when I used interpreters I knew enough Gitxsanimx, especially those words which pertain to kinship, to know that it was difficult for some of the interpreters to ask and answer the questions regarding kinship accurately. For these reasons I began to interview middle-aged women whenever possible. The women would usually have a lot of

genealogical knowledge, including some that the male chiefs would not have, such as the names of all the latest grandchildren and great grandchildren. These women would also usually have the ability to communicate easily in English. After I had obtained a large part of the information I sought from those with whom it was easy to communicate, I would then see the elderly chief or house member to ask the difficult questions. It was a better process to get the bulk of the information easily from a younger person rather than tire the elders with questions just as easily answered by others.

I was somewhat surprised to learn that, on occasion, the best informant regarding the genealogy of a particular house might not even be a member of that house. These informants were often elderly widows of male house members. It was not unusual for a man's wife, of any age, to be more informed about his house genealogy than he was because genealogy is women's knowledge more than it is men's. A daughter of a male house member could sometimes provide genealogical information regarding her father's house.

Genealogical information was sometimes provided by people who did not seem to be very closely related biologically to those she or he described, but who were very close socially

because of the relationship created by generations of cross-cousin marriage. The members of two houses which had been allied this way through many marriages over several generations would know each other very well. Nearly every house has one or more such houses from which it regularly draws marriage partners. This pattern will be discussed in more detail in the section on cross-cousin marriage.

When I went to interview a house member about their family tree, after I had explained who I was and why I was doing the research, I would begin to ask them questions which would fill in a matrilineal genealogy. I went into the interviews assuming kinship was matrilineal because every Gitksan you meet tells you, "We belong to our mothers' side." I also began the research with the assumption that houses were kinship units, in spite of previously published anthropological literature to the contrary (Adams 1973:31; Kasakoff 1984:78), because every Gitksan will tell you that and because the Gitksan use the word "house" interchangeably with "family" when speaking in English. It is my assumption that members of a society know more about their culture than researchers who spend a short time among them. I was aware that members of a society may express an ideal rather than a reality about their cultural institutions, so I was open to evidence to the contrary on

this issue; but I had been living among the Gitksan long enough already to see that houses did, indeed, seem to be kinship units. The research proved that this was so without a doubt.

When I began the interviews, I drew rough diagrams as the informant talked; and I would be sure to take every lead to its logical conclusion until a dead end was reached. After this process was complete, I would ask if there were any more house members. Often there were, because in quite a few houses there are lineages with connections which are forgotten. I say "forgotten" rather than "unknown", because the people say that is the case; there was always the possibility that further information would come to light. I also assumed that the lineages in a house were connected, usually biologically, sometimes by adoption, because after a small amount of research it became clear that is the logic of Gitksan house formation. In many cases my initial interview concerning a house would leave me with several lineages which I could not connect, but often further information resulted in the revelation of the biological connection between the lineages.

During the interviews, I recorded the existance of the members of each house, by birth or adoption, as well as

additional information for each individual. I would record English name and Gitksan name where they existed. Those born before about 1900 (later in more remote villages like Kuldo'o and Kisga'ga'as) did not usually have English names at birth. Older people who were living at that time often had English names which were taken later in life, sometimes when they were baptised by missionaries, sometimes so they could be paid when they worked at the salmon canneries on the coast at Prince Rupert. Possibly until the 1940s all children were given Gitksan names at birth, but that is no longer so. Today, all middle aged and old people have Gitksan names, but only a few children have them.

While I was interviewing people, I sometimes collected birth dates; but often I obtained them from written records, especially the more recent ones which could be found on band lists. Some birth dates for people who were alive in the 1920s were obtained from the Indian Census Records, but those documents can not be considered accurate. Four factors made that obvious. One was that the document was first drawn up in 1921 and a very large number of the birth dates ended in a 1 or a 5, indicating that the recorder looked at people and guessed their age to be 20, 25, 30, 35, etcetera. The second indicator of the inaccuracy of these records lay in the fact that many birth

dates were given as January 1. The third factor was that impossible inconsistencies were recorded, such as only six years between a mother and her daughter. The final evidence for the inaccuracy of these records was the testimony of the elders, who knew them to be wrong, and gave information which was more logical and consistent with other dates.

As I collected the genealogical information for each house, I would collect information on the spouses of past and present house members. This is very important information for indicating marriage patterns. The most important information concerning a spouse is house membership. It was important to me because it indicates cross-cousin marriage, the practice of the levirate and sororate, and so on. That a spouse's house membership was also important to the Gitksan was made obvious by the number of times that the only piece of information known about a spouse might be his or her house membership. Very frequently Gitksan will not remember an individual's name but will remember his or her house. House membership is seen as more important than individual identity.

When I began my research, even before I went out to interview Gitksan, I had set up a file for each house.

This set of files had to be reorganized periodically, as I found that what I once thought was two houses was in fact only two lineages within a house, or that two previously separate houses had now amalgamated, or other such information. Each new piece of information gleaned from library research, interviews or any other source would be put in the appropriate house file. During my interviews, the most important question I asked was, "What house does he (she or it) belong to?". If I went to interview Mary Johnson about her house, she might mention ten other houses as well because with clan exogamy, the members of her house would always have spouses and fathers from other clans and houses. When I returned to my office after an interview, I would make as many photocopies as I needed, so that I could place copies of the original interview notes into the file of every house mentioned. This eventually became a good system of cross checking, since every Gitksan person would be described at least twice, once as a member of his or her own house and once as the spouse of the member of another house. In fact, most individuals were mentioned many times by many informants, especially individuals of high rank.

From the outset I assumed that the most valuable source of information would be the Gitksan people, especially the

elders. This proved to be true. In fact, reliance upon written records for genealogical information probably led to the erroneous conclusions reached by Adams (1973) and Kasakoff (1984) regarding the nature of Gitksan kinship and social structure, as I will demonstrate in this thesis.

Several factors make the Gitksan more reliable sources of information on their genealogy than written records. First, the organizing principle of Gitksan social structure is the matrilineal kinship unit, the house. Census-type records such as band lists, the Indian census records, and the federal census do not record this type of information. Government agencies have either been unaware of matrilineality, or have actively sought to replace it with patrilineality. The bias against matrilineality was somewhat ameliorated with the passing of Bill C-31 in 1985; but it has not been completely eliminated, and certainly there is no active effort on the part of the government to record group membership as matrilineal peoples see it. Church records are similar to government records in that they record only patrilineal kinship. There are some scattered pieces of information which relate to the matrilineal genealogy of the Gitksan to be found in written records such as the Barbeau (n.d.a) and Duff files (n.d.), but these are sparse and not systematic. The various

census records and church records are not completely without value; I did use them, but mainly to confirm or fill in information gathered from the people concerning house membership.

Using written records for Gitksan genealogies is also problematic because Europeans came so late to Gitksan territory that their records do not go back very far. The earliest census of the Gitksan was in 1881, and this document is virtually useless. The Gitksan did not have English names at that time; and in some villages the census taker went from dwelling to dwelling, recording people as "Kisegas (village name) Joe", "Kisegas Mary", or even "Kisegas Indian". Even when a census taker did try to do a careful job of recording each individual by name, he found himself faced with a language that has 24 sounds not found in English. The result was generally incomprehensible. The first useable and obtainable census of the Gitksan was recorded by the Department of Indian Affairs in 1921, by which time most Gitksan had English names. Because of the lateness of written records for the Gitksan, I was able to obtain much more information, going much farther back, from informants. Many of my informants were born before the first usable records; and most of them knew their ancestors at least two or three generations

back, a fact which sometimes took the oral genealogical record back 100 years farther than the written records.

The censuses for 1891, 1901, and 1911 would have been increasingly useful as more Gitksan took English names throughout that period; but census records are closed for 100 years, and Statistics Canada would not release them when I was involved in the genealogical research. The 1891 census has since been released and obtained by the Gitksan, but it was not available at the time I did most of my research. It is not likely to have changed my research results, though, because I have examined it and there were still not many English names (none at all in some villages). In any case, Gitksan elders were able to provide a considerable amount of information concerning that period which was generally the time of their parent's generation.

The information obtained from informants was also more valuable on the other end of the chronology as well. It was difficult to get up-to-date information from written records; but relatives are, of course, aware of every recent birth, death, or adoption in their house. During the initial research, the local office of the Department of Indian Affairs was quite cooperative in providing

information; but after the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en made their Statement of Claim regarding their land suit, the Department seemed to become less cooperative.

With the Gitksan as the prime source of information, the written records were mostly used to confirm what elders had said, or to fill in the occasional omission. The written records were most useful for dates; and on more recent documents, such as the band lists which were kept after 1951, the dates are usually accurate. The earlier documents, such as the Indian Census Records of 1920 and 1930, are somewhat problematic because the census taker went about the villages guessing peoples' ages, as was previously mentioned. Most often the census takers erred on the side of youth, it seems. This error probably occurred because of the extreme vigour of some Gitksan of considerable age. For a Gitksan of 70 or 75 to do the work of a young man is not unusual today; but that kind of ability was said to be even more common before automobiles, electricity, new diseases, and bad habits made people weak. The elders often insisted that their grandparents were much older than the records say. They punctuate this claim with stories describing how strong and healthy elderly people were in the recent past, attributing their vigour to lots of exercise, especially walking, no modern conveniences,

good food, no alcohol; and increased power through **si'setxw**, which is ritual means of increasing power through purification.

Many elderly Gitksan will attest to the fact that their names are recorded incorrectly on the records. One elder, the late David Gunanoot, Niigyep of the Wolf Clan of Gitanmaax, told me that a year after he was born, his mother took him to the mission at Bear Lake, where he was baptised. His baptismal date was recorded as his birth date, so he was not able to get his pension until he was actually 66. He said, "I know I am a year older than they say because my mother told me and she should know."(1986). Another very elderly man, the late Moses Morrison, Gitluudaahlxw of the Fireweed Clan of Kispiox, said that he knew he was older that the Indian Agent's records because he could remember that Queen Victoria died when he was seven or eight. Also, the Indian Agent recorded his birthday as January 1, which was the date which the agents always used when they did not know. Another elder, Joshua Campbell, Xsimwiits'iin of the Frog Clan of Gitanmaax, told me that the reason the Indian Agent did not always know the peoples' birth dates was because they were often not born in the village. He told me how his parents were travelling down the Skeena River by canoe when they had to stop and

make camp, where his mother gave birth to him. David Gunanoot told me a similar story of being born on the trail on Antgwulilibiksxw territory while his family was travelling through on the way to the Nass River.

Many of the elders have remarkable memories, especially those renowned as genealogists, Mary Johnson being the consummate among them, as I had mentioned previously. I was shocked to hear Mary, then in her seventies, describe events that had occurred when she was as young as three; and then later to find her memories confirmed as accurate by other elders and written records. One elder referred me to Mary for further information after she had exhausted her own store of information on the subject we were discussing. This lady, Gertie Morrison, Nagahl Banda and Xsaxgyoo, of the House of 'Wii 'Muug'ulsxw of the Wolf Clan of Kispiox, was older than Mary; but easily conceded that Mary knew more than she did about many traditional subjects, especially genealogy. Gertie told me, "I remember from the time Mary was three years old she would sit with the old people and she would never quit asking questions." (Morrison 1984).

The information given to me by the elders was cross-checked when other elders would give me the same information.

Almost everyone would be described as a member of their own house, and again as a member of their spouse's house. People who were high ranked, lived to a great age, or had many descendants would usually be described repeatedly. There was usually a high degree of accuracy between the various informants, and often agreement between written records and informants. When I did get conflicting information, I would make note of it and specifically work to resolve the discrepancy.

During each interview, I would ask a series of questions which would logically fill in a matrilineal genealogy. I would ask, "Who are your brothers and sisters? Your sister's children? Your mother and her brothers and sisters?" and so on. I followed all logical possibilities until I had reached dead ends. I would then ask if there were any other members in the house; and, if there were, I would ask the same series of questions again. Then I would ask if the informant knew how the two lineages were related. If they did not know the precise relationship, they would often answer, "Maybe our grandmothers were sisters," which intimates that although the speaker does not know the exact biological relationship, he assumes there is one because that is the logic of house membership. If the members of one lineage were the descendants of an adopted person, that would likely be remembered and

recounted because it would refer to an important event in the history of the house such as a population crisis. The final result of this kind of questioning could be one lineage of five or six generations among whom the biological connections are known, or several discrete lineages. In many cases, further information from additional informants would connect some or all of the lineages. Large houses of over two hundred people are more likely to have lineages with forgotten connections. Six was the largest number of unconnected lineages in one house by the time I finished the research.

2. Language and Terminology

Most of the genealogical interviews were conducted in English. Most Gitksan speak at least some English, although there are a few elders who do not. I have some understanding of Gitxsanimx, but I cannot speak it. I soon came to understand those words most often used in a discussion of kinship, so that I was able to understand what was being said when an informant would use Gitksan kinship terms. I was even able to understand kinship terminologies well enough that I understood discussions in

Gitxsanimx concerning kinship better than the translator at times.

In some cases, I needed to speak to elders who did not speak English; and therefore, I was required to use a translator. At times; I would use my husband as a translator because he is a very skilled speaker of the language, but I would try to use a relative of the elder whenever possible. Using an relative as translator fulfils more than one function, in that the relative not only translates but acts as a mediator, introducing me, someone not known well, or, at times, not known at all to the elder. Having a relative explain the purpose of the research would often make the elder feel more confident about the use to which the information would be put. Knowledge is one of the highest values to the Gitksan, and elders do not give it lightly. They want to be certain that it will be used appropriately. When a relative explains why the information is needed, the elder usually feels confident that his or her nephew, niece, daughter, or son has ensured that the information will be used properly and for no ulterior motives.

Regardless of whether English or Gitxsanimx is used, the kinship terms of either language are imprecise; and served

only as a guide in directing me to ask the appropriate question to obtain a precise designation of kinship. What I am referring to here is the necessity to break kinship designations down to the eight basic terms: mother, father, daughter, son, sister, brother, wife, or husband. So, if I asked an elder, "How is Mary Morrison related to you?" and she replied, "She's my aunt," I then asked, "Your mother's sister?". If the answer was not affirmative, I had to continue asking questions until I obtained a precise answer.

Regardless of whether the kinship terms used were English or Gitksan, I had to follow this procedure. The Gitksan have many more kinship terms than are found in English; but they are actually less specific, because the Gitksan refer to a far larger number of people by these terms.

When the Gitksan use English kinship terms, they often use them in ways which do not precisely accord with English usage. Sometimes they will preface such usage with "in the Indian way", but sometimes they will not. For example, when a Gitksan person says "aunt" in English, he or she may mean mother's or father's sister, mother's or father's brother's wife, mother's mother's sister's daughter, mother's mother's mother's sister's daughter's daughter; or

virtually any female relative one generation older, not their mother, and related in any conceivable way. Even if they cannot trace the relationship but have a close personal relationship with an older woman, they will use the term "aunt", as in the case of a very distantly related woman of their father's father's clan. This is not the same as calling all women one generation older, "aunt", because they do not do that. There has to be some kind of relationship; but it may be very distant, possibly six or more generations removed.

At times, I would often have to ask, "Was Mary Morrison your mother's real sister, same mother, same father?" to be certain that she was not an adopted sister, which was very common. If the answer was negative, I would trace the precise relationship using the eight basic terms. Although an adopted sister would be treated just as a biological sister would, the elders and others I interviewed would nearly always know who was related biologically and who was adopted. When they understood that the purpose of my research was to record biological as well as social relationships, I usually would not have to ask if a relationship was biological or not.

As I undertook the genealogical research, I soon came to

see that people were often related in more than one way. This is not unusual in a small society, especially one with a cross-cousin marriage preference. When two people are related in more than one way, they will usually use the closer of the two appropriate kinship terms. In the case in which a man's father's sister was married to his mother's uncle, he would probably call the man **nibip** (uncle) rather than **ye'e** (grandfather). In some cases in which two people were related in more than one way, it is unnecessary to chose between kinship terms because both of those types of relationship are called by the same kinship term. The reason is that with cross-cousin marriage, they will be expected to be related in more than one way. An example is **nibip**, which refers to one's mother's brother and one's father's sister's husband. If the cross-cousin marriage preference has been observed, MB and FZH are the same individual.

Kinship terms can be applied to a very wide range of people in Gitksan society. All house members can, and usually are, referred to by kinship terms. If they are not, it is usually because the house is very large and the relationship is very distant biologically and socially. At times, the use or lack of use of kinship terms can express pleasure or displeasure with a house member. Kinship terms

are usually used for members of one's father's house; certainly for those in the same lineage within the house of one's father. They would also be used for father's father and his close relatives, and for father's father's father and his close relatives. Kinship terms are often used for members of other houses within one's clan, especially if one is emotionally close to that individual, or on public occasions where clan solidarity is important. Kinship terms can be used in a somewhat manipulative manner to include people when enlisting support, or they can be used with a slightly sarcastic tone to sting someone lightly for lack of support. To use kinship terms in such a manner is unusual, though. They are usually applied with the greatest love and respect, and often seem to be used as terms of endearment.

3. Completeness of the Genealogies

Genealogies, of course, can never be complete. They are like living organisms. House members are born, marry, and die. They take new hereditary titles, are adopted in and out of houses. Even at the time I stopped gathering genealogical information, there was more that could have been gathered. However, the genealogies were complete

enough that the additional information would not be likely to change the conclusions which arose from them; because most of the living Gitksan, many of their ancestors, and much of the pertinent information about them was recorded. For each genealogy most of the house members were recorded; their immediate ancestors, usually from three to seven generations back, the spouses of house members, the spouse's house, English and Gitksan names of most, and birth and death dates of many. This was the main body of evidence contributing to my conclusions.

The kind of information which is missing from the genealogies is of lesser significance, such as children born to house members who have moved away and not maintained contact (these are few in number), children's Gitksan names, some birth and death dates. This missing information would not alter my basic interpretation of the Gitksan kinship system.

On the basis of the hundreds of thousands of pieces of information collected from hundreds of interviews with over 200 individuals, and from dozens of documents, I can confidently say that this is the most complete genealogical study of the Gitksan undertaken. Since I left this research, the Gitksan have continued to work intermittently

on the genealogies. Often the work has been undertaken by house members who work exclusively on their own house genealogy. I understand that some of them are now more complete than I left them, while many of the rest are more out of date now. When I last worked on them, the Gitksan were trying to get the genealogies on computer, which, because of their matrilineal kinship system, necessitated the creation of a unique computer program. The prohibitive cost of this computer programming was making the undertaking difficult.

It pleases me to say that the genealogies have turned out to have continuing usefulness to the Gitksan. When I first began the research, I believe that none of us had any idea how enduringly useful they would be. They are presently being used in the Territory Management Program which teaches house members how better to manage their territories; the Unlocking Aboriginal Justice Program, which provides alternative means to deal with offenders; the Reconnection Program, which is attempting to reinstitute the traditional family-oriented support network; the Health Transfer Program, in which the Gitksan are working towards taking control of health and health-related services; the Culture Camp Program, which takes troubled young people to camps in remote areas for

cultural, social, emotional, and spiritual re-education; the Brighter Futures Program, which is a health and education program; and possibly others.

IV Social Structure

As in other small societies, almost all aspects of the social structure are kin-based. The social, economic, and political aspects of life are all organized according to kinship. Even the spiritual and aesthetic are arranged to a considerable degree by kinship. I find when I talk about any aspect of Gitksan society, I cannot expect it to make sense to anyone unless I explain the social structure first, which basically means houses and clans.

1. House

The Gitksan word for "house" is "**wilp**", and it usually refers to one of two things. One of these is a dwelling or some other kind of building, and the other is a group of matrilineally related kin. Which is being referred to is taken from the context.

The terms which have been used by other anthropologists have often been confusing. Barbeau (1929:9) called the houses "families", but did not understand their composition very well in that he doubted their biological relationships and implied that house members were not commonly found

living outside of their own village. Jenness (1932:337) refers to "houses" of the Gitksan, and appears to be referring to the kinship unit the Gitksan call "**wilp**"; but he does not clarify enough for me to be sure. Jenness (1943) is more explicit in his description of the social units of the Carrier (Wet'suwet'en), in which he calls the Wet'suwet'en **yax** (houses) "clans". He mentions the equivalence of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en systems, but does not explicitly apply the term "clan" to Gitksan houses. Garfield and Wingert (1951:22) uses the terms "household or lineage" to describe what is probably a house. Adams (1973:3) refers to the **wilp** as "houses", but does not understand their composition or function, believing them to be corporate units created and continually recreated to adjust people to resources. The difficulty in using any of the terms used by previous writers is that none seems to have exactly understood the composition of a **wilp**, therefore the terms they use cannot be applied accurately.

There is no completely appropriate anthropological term for "**wilp**", so I (and other researchers working among the Gitksan in recent years) have maintained the use of "**wilp**" or "house". "Lineage" is inappropriate because not all houses are composed of a group of kin between whom the

exact biological connections are known. In fact, some houses have several lineages. Although the term "clan" is sometimes applied to the **wilp**, it is not appropriate either because "clan" refers to a group that assumes common ancestry but cannot demonstrate it, while the lineages in many houses can definitely demonstrate their common ancestry.

"Household" has been used to indicate **wilp**, but it is inappropriate because it connotes a residential unit. The entire **wilp** has never lived as a residential unit. In the past, each **wilp** had a large named cedar plank dwelling in its village of origin. Many house members would live in this dwelling, including high ranking men, their heirs, divorced female house members, some widowed female house members, and others. But many people who were members of other houses would also live in this dwelling. Most of these would be the wives and children of male house members, and sometimes lower ranked men from other houses who resided with their wives' families. The members of other houses living in the dwelling maintained their membership in their original kinship unit, owed their primary allegiance to it, and could expect their primary support from it. The residents of a dwelling were a changing unit while house membership was stable, for the

most part changing only as members were born and died. Today Gitksan live in mainly nuclear family units, but houses are no less kinship units than they were in the past.

Theoretically, the relationship between all house members is supposed to be knowable. The elders say that a house is a family, and that the family members are related through their mothers. This statement is supported by the logic of matrilineal descent; and there can be no dispute that the Gitksan reckon kinship matrilineally, without exception. In many houses, especially smaller ones, the exact biological relationship between house members is known. But the Gitksan do not claim that the biological relationship between all house members must be known. The elders say that the biological relationship between house members exists and therefore could be known if enough genealogical information was available. Actual traceability is not demanded, nor is it necessary for the system to function.

The house is the essential unit in Gitksan society. It is the owner of land and other important property such as the **adaa'o<u>x</u>** (histories), **aiyuukxws** (crests), **lim'x oo'iiy** (songs), and other things. It is not precisely an economic

and residential unit, but it is the focus of both. The **wilp** is the essential unit within which a Gitksan is socially defined. An individual's position within the house is defined by rank, and his or her relationship to others outside the house is defined by the rank of the house and the position of the individual in it. The house is the unit an individual considers his family: "family" and "house" are often used interchangeably by the Gitksan.

The relationship between house members is still maintained today. House members continue to use their territories together for fishing, hunting, trapping, wood cutting, food and medicinal plant gathering, and other uses. House members continue to function together in the village as well. They act together in the feast, of course; but a considerable degree of house solidarity is maintained through daily activities. House members work together, assist each other, look after each other's children, visit back and forth, borrow from each other, and do many other things with greater frequency than with non-house members of equal biological relationship. Once I had gained a certain level of genealogical knowledge, I was able to observe that in daily interaction, most Gitksan spend more time with their matrilineal kin than with other kin or non-kin.

Although most Gitksan interact more with their matrilineal kin than with others, some would spend more time with their father's kin. In pre-contact times, the post-marital residence rule was avunculocal; so children were raised in the dwelling of their father's **wilp**, surrounded by their father's kin. Fathers were emotionally very close to their children, and assumed a large part of the economic and educational responsibility for the upbringing. A father and his house would also have many social-ceremonial obligations towards his children. Today, as in the past, most children are raised in their father's home, are emotionally close to their fathers and fathers' relatives, and receive much social and ceremonial support from their father and his relatives.

The village where one's house dwelling once stood is always considered home, even today. This concept is referred to by the Gitksan as "village of origin". For thousands of years, until the second decade of this century for many Gitksan, the house would have had a residential focus in its house dwelling, although not all of the house members would have lived in the dwelling at one time. The Gitksan conception of home and residence was, and still is, different from that of most Canadians. A Gitksan "lives" where he is at the moment, he "stays" where he has been

residing lately; and "home" is his village of origin, where his **wilp** dwelling once stood. This conception of residence is not surprising in light of the fact that Gitksan villages often exist for thousands of years (2) while, during the yearly round, a Gitksan may spend a considerable amount of time away from the village at the hunting ground, berry grounds, fishing sites, and other locations. There is both a deep and abiding attachment to home, and a need to be away from it for some time each year. Both today and in the past, those who "stay" in a village not their own will usually maintain strong ties with home. Those residing away will return frequently for informal visits, will return for fishing and other economic pursuits, and will always return to put up and attend feasts in their village of origin.

In the past, when many house members lived in their **wilp** dwelling, each dwelling would sit on a small patch of land in the village, which it would own, while the land surrounding the village site would be the territory of a particular house. Kispiox, for example, sits on the territory of Maus of the Frog Clan, and Gitanmaax is on the territory of Spookxw of the Wolf Clan. Each dwelling had a name of its own, and would often have a crest of the owners painted on it. Most house members would live at

least some of their lives in their own house dwelling, even though they usually began life in their fathers' houses. Chiefs' heirs were especially likely, at puberty, to return to their uncles' homes to complete their education and to prepare for their future duties. The majority of male house members would live most of their lives in their **wilp** dwellings; but some men might reside for a time with their spouses' families, especially if the man was low ranked (and therefore unessential to house business), and if his house was short of resources at the time while his wife's house had an excess of resources.

House membership and Gitksan citizenship are equivalent. One cannot be Gitksan if not a member of a house. Each Gitksan is born into the house of his or her mother, and usually remains a member of that house until death. The child of a Gitksan man and a non-Gitksan woman is not Gitksan. Such a child must be adopted (**ts'imilguudit**) into a house to become Gitksan. House members are all those to whom a matrilineal relationship can be traced, no matter how distant, and those who are known to be house members even if the relationship between lineages is forgotten.

Ordinarily, one cannot lose house membership. If a Gitksan moves away for many years, he is still considered Gitksan.

I was told of people who had moved away fifty or more years ago and disappeared but were still remembered as house members. During the period of my research two cases occurred in which people who had been away for a very long time were welcomed back into their families and communities as if they had just left last week. One Killerwhale Clan woman had been adopted out as a baby, and had been gone for over 30 years. She returned to the community with her husband and children, met her relatives for the first time, and took her place in her house as if she had always been there. She and her children were given hereditary names, and soon became active house and community members. Another Wolf Clan woman had been away for forty years; and like the Killerwhale Clan woman, was welcomed back into her house and village.

Not infrequently, I have attended funeral potlatches for people I have never met; sometimes never heard of. Even if a house member has been living away for many years, contributing nothing to Gitksan society, his body will be returned home to be buried with honour. A funeral feast will be held, and all expenses will be paid by his house and clan.

Historically, it was possible to lose house membership by

banishment, although I have not heard of such a thing occurring recently. If a person committed a serious crime such as **gaats** (incest), murder, or repeated serious crimes, he could lose his house membership by being cast out of his community. At times, such an ostracized person could obtain membership in a different house if another house and village were willing to accept him. The 'Wiiget **adaa'ox** relates how 'Wiiget and his clan sister were banished from their village for committing **gaats**. They eventually gained membership in other houses and villages when they gave up their forbidden relationship (Barbeau 1929:104).

Marriage does not usually affect the house membership of either sex. Even living in a different village or nation, each partner in a marriage maintains membership in his or her own house. When a Gitksan person marries into a different nation, such as the Nisga'a or Wet'suwet'en, he or she will often be adopted into a house in the community in which he or she resides. The adopting house will usually be of the same clan as the adoptee's original house; possibly even a related house. In such cases, membership in his original Gitksan house will usually be maintained. A person with such dual house membership will participate in feasts put on by his new house; and will usually return home to participate in feasts with his

original house, especially if the feast is an important one, as in the case of the death of a high ranking person of the house or someone closely related biologically to the adopted-out person.

As was previously mentioned, smaller houses are often composed of one unilineal kin group among whom the exact biological relationship is known by all or most house members. Larger houses include two or more lineages. One house of over two hundred people had six lineages between which the biological relationship was not known. The members of each lineage will usually be aware that they are more closely related within the lineage than to those in other lineages in the house. When the connection between lineages is unknown, it is assumed to exist but that the connection has been forgotten by living people. This is often expressed as, "Maybe our grandmothers were sisters." Often, during my first few interviews concerning a particular house, I would not learn the biological connections between all members of the house; but with further research those connections were found to be known. One person may be able to say how A is related to B, while a second person knows how B is related to C, making the connection between A and C which the first person spoken to did not know.

For some houses, it is not likely that all the biological connections will ever be known; but the house members assume they are related according to the rules of house group membership. It may be that the two sisters who were the ancestors of the two branches of the house died long ago. This information is not remembered by living house members because it is not essential to the functioning of the house, unlike the history and connections between houses which dictates their relationships. The houses are seen as primary and eternal while individuals are seen as ephemeral.

This biological continuity of house membership would be broken only in the case of the descendants of women who were adopted into the house. This event raises the question of the importance of biological relationship versus social and legal relationship. Houses are defined primarily as biological units, but they are also social and legal units. An adopted woman and her descendants are socially and legally house members just as the adopted child of a Canadian family is socially and legally part of that family. Adoption of house members was and is not a common occurrence. By far the majority of house members are members by birth.

House populations at the time of my research ranged from less than five to nearly three hundred, with an average of about 80 people. A house with very few members cannot fulfil its obligations in the feast hall, or protect its property easily. In the past, houses with very low numbers would have a hard time surviving economically. The members of a house with low population can survive today because of the alternative economic system available in the form of wages, business enterprise, and government transfer payments. In most cases, steps are taken to reinforce a house when its population declines. House population can be augmented by natural increase or through adoption.

In some cases two lineages within a house will become fairly separate entities with separate membership, names and, land-holdings within the house territory. This relationship is referred to as **sto'o wilp**, or sides of a house. Each side will have its own leader of considerable power and influence. The leading chiefs of each side may have been brothers or cousins who were both powerful leaders who developed their own following. Meluulak and Haiwas are **sto'o wilp** today, as are **Xsk̲oogimlaxha** and **Simoogithlgyemk̲**. The **sto'o wilp** may eventually separate and become two houses. In most houses, solidarity is more apparent than is the separation of **sto'o wilp**.

2. Wilnadaahl

As I mentioned in the introduction, when I first began the genealogical research, I wanted someone to give me a list of all the Gitksan houses; and I thought I would go out and fill them in genealogically. It turned out that no one could make me such a list that everyone could agree on. I looked at research that had been done before by anthropologists such as Barbeau and Duff. I looked at lists that had been made by previous researchers for the Tribal Council, and I asked researchers and elders for a list of all the Gitksan houses. No one could agree on such a list. It took me several months to begin to understand why and several years to understand completely. Even when I testified in court, I discovered during my evidence that the lawyers, who had been preparing for the case for several years, learning an enormous amount about Gitksan culture, did not understand the confusion about houses. In our evening meetings after the day's testimony was over, I had to explain it to them; and I created a chart which we brought into court the next day to clarify the matter for the court (see Appendix 3).

At the crux of this confusion is the concept of **wilnadaahl**. I had heard Gitksan mention **wilnadaahl**. I had read about

wilnadaahl in Adams (1973:23). When I went to Gitksan with Adams' definition of **wilnadaahl**, I received not a glimmer of recognition. Adams has house and **wilnadaahl** confused at times, as well as bringing in extraneous and incorrect factors (this is discussed in more detail beginning on page 72). (He is correct, however, when he says that the **wilnadaahl** have separate migration myths.) When I asked Gitksan what **wilnadaahl** was, I never once got the same definition. Eventually, as I learned about the history of some of the houses, I came to understand **wilnadaahl**. I then realized that all the different definitions I had received from Gitksan were correct but only part of the concept.

Simply, **wilnadaahl** are groups of related houses. The term refers only to houses within one clan; but it can refer to anything from one house to all houses in a clan, so it can be used synonymously with both "house" and "clan"; but its most significant use is when it is applied to something between the two. When I started to learn the **adaa'ox̲**, I really came to understand what **wilnadaahl** meant and why there was so much confusion. To know which houses are **wilnadaahl** to which others, one must have extensive knowledge of the history of every Gitksan house, not to mention related houses among other nations of the northwest

including the Ts'imsian, Nisga'a, Tlingit, Haida, Kitamaat, Tahltan, Wet'suwet'en, and others.

Wilnadaahl is a word of flexible meaning. When the word is used, the meaning on that occasion is taken from the context; but it always refers to some kind of historical relationship, or a current relationship which arose from historical circumstances. One of the most important elements of the **adaa'ox** is the recording of the origins and migrations of each house. House fissions and fusions are also recorded in these stories. The kind of relationship defined by the concept **wilnadaahl** will include a place of ancient origin, the criterion used by Barbeau (1929:9) in dividing what he called "phratries" into "clans". I would use "clan" where Barbeau used "phratry", and "**wilnadaahl**" where he used "clan", although he saw these "clans" as some kind of concrete and definable groups, which they were not. A flexible term like **wilnadaahl** is needed to describe the complex historical relationship between Gitksan houses.

The term **wilnadaahl** may not be applied only to those groups which shared the earliest known origin. It might be used to refer to a relationship at any point in history; and it does not necessarily refer to those houses with a known, ancient biological connection. To put it another way, all

the houses which may be referred to as part of a **wilnadaahl** do not have to be subdivisions of a single original ancient ancestral kin group, although the term may be used in this way. A very common use of **wilnadaahl** which does not necessarily refer to ancient origin would be when a chief stands up in the feast hall and thanks the **wilnadaahl** for helping him put up the feast. In such a case he would be referring to all those houses of his clan which came to the feast to help him. It can also be used to refer to all the houses of one clan living in a village at a particular point in time, including at the current time.

When talking about **wilnadaahl**, Gitksan often refer to degree of closeness. A person from 'Wii Muug'ulsxw house might say, "We are closer to Xhliiyemlaxha than we are to 'Niist." This expression would be a reference to the kinds of historical relationships described above. The closest relationship that two houses could have is when one is an immediate subdivision of the other. Slightly more distant would be houses which had a common ancient ancestor, but which have divided and divided again. Houses within a clan which have no known common ancestry would consider themselves most distant, although they might refer to each other as **wilnadaahl** when the situation warranted, as when enlisting support or giving thanks for it.

3. Clans

The next level of social grouping in Gitksan society is the clan. The Gitksan word for "clan" is "**p'tex̲'t**", which the Gitksan commonly translate into English as "clan" or "tribe". The Gitksan **p'tex̲'t** are:

Lax̲ Seel or Ganada	- Frog/Raven
Lax̲ Gibuu	- Wolf
Gisgaast	- Fireweed/Killerwhale
Lax̲ Sk̲iik	- Eagle

The houses which are members of each clan claim to be related in some way, both within the Gitksan nation and beyond. The equivalent clans and moieties in other northwest nations may have the same name and major crests as the Gitksan clans or they may be different, but they will share some of the same ancient history. These international clans might be more properly defined as "phratries", but I am reluctant to apply the term even to them because these groups do have common origins, and phratries are usually defined as the "union of two (or more) clans" (Winick 1977:412), which suggests the confederation of originally separate units.

The **adaa'ox̲** record the relationship between houses in each

clan, in the cases of the Wolf and Raven Clans, back to the Pleistocene (3). These histories describe more than one major migration of Wolf and Raven Clan peoples from the northern interior with their clan membership already in place, as well as a coastal origin for one group of people who became Wolf Clan ancestors. A slightly later arrival and a different coastal origin is described for the Eagle Clan. The Fireweed Clan is described as the only clan originating within the northwest. The **adaa'ox** then trace the travels and major historical events of the descendants of those original people since that time. Many houses have **adaa'ox** which can trace a complex pattern of fission and fusion with dozens of other groups since their origin. It is the relationships described in such stories which determine degrees of closeness between houses in a clan.

Writers on Ts'imsian social organization often say clans are "divided into" houses (Jenness 1932:337; Garfield and Wingert 1951:20), but I do not think that is an accurate representation. The oral histories indicate that the larger clan groups came from one origin, in the north, while the smaller house-like groups came from another origin, on the coast. When these two peoples with different forms of social organization met and joined, they melded their two systems to form the one known in the

northwest today. I know of nothing which indicates that one system is primary over the other; so, in discussing the relationship between clans and houses, I try to use language which does not indicate the primacy of one over the other.

The group I call "clans", Barbeau (1929) calls "phratries". He uses the term "clan" to refer to a group which I could only call a **wilnadaahl**. Barbeau says they "embrace a number of families", and "as often as not, reside in various tribes that may be part of one nation or more" (1929:9). He says, "What is fundamental in the concept of clan is that their 'blood', their origin, their ancient history, their most ancient crests and privileges should be the same." (1929:9). Such a definition would have to have a considerable degree of arbitrariness because, in the final description, each house has a somewhat different origin; and if one traces the history back far enough, all or nearly all, houses in a clan will have the same ancient origin. Some arbitrary point would have to be chosen to separate those groups which Barbeau calls clans. That is not to say that such relationships of origin do not exist, that is what the Gitksan refer to as **wilnadaahl**; but they use the term with flexibility, referring to a different set of houses depending on the period of their history they are

describing. One cannot name "clans" the way Barbeau (1929:10) does when he talks about the "Prairie clan" or the "Wild-rice clan" of the Wolves or the "Sky clan" or the "Wild-rice clan" of the Fireweeds. It is true that some Wolf houses and some Fireweed houses lived in the same ancient village, Gitangasx̲ (Place of Wild Rice), at a certain point in their history; but every one of those houses can tell different histories, from both before and after the time they lived at Gitangasx̲. There is nothing seminal about having lived at Gitangasx̲, as opposed to having lived at Laxwiiyip before that time or K̲aldo'o after that time, that makes those who lived at Gitangasx̲ some kind of cohesive group.

Jenness (1932:337) does not relate exact definitions; but he does say the "phratries" of the Ts'imsian were subdivided into "clans and 'houses'", indicating that, like Barbeau, he saw clans as intermediary between "phratries" and houses. Garfield and Wingert (1951), too, are not completely clear in all their definitions of social units. They are clear in their description of "phratries", which is the same as Barbeau's, what I call "clans"; but in discussing their composition, they say, "They were essentially loose federations of clans, which were the named subdivisions of phratries." (1951:20). They then go

on to say that members of a clan share history, and to name the same "clans" named by Barbeau (1951:20). These "clan" names were created by Barbeau (1929:10) for convenience when describing a large number of lengthy origin histories; the Gitksan and other northwest peoples do not, in fact, name such groups. In recognizing common origin with others, the Gitksan might say, "We all lived at Gitangasx at the same time," or "We lived at Laxwiiyip a long time ago"; but they would not have a name for such a group because the migration stories are so complex that the group residing in one place could change from century to century throughout their 10,000 years of remembered history.

Adams (1973) uses different terminologies than earlier writers. The groups which I call "clans", he calls "crests". Crest is not an inaccurate name, because each clan has one or more major crests which is usually referred to in the clan name. The Gisgaast clan, called Gisga'haast by those from the northern villages, are the Fireweed Clan, the Gitksan word for "fireweed" being "**haast**". The Wolf Clan, Lax Gibuu, can be translated as "concerning the wolf" (**gibuu** is Gitxsanimx for wolf). Beyond this level, Adams' description of Gitksan social organization becomes very confusing.

After describing "crests", Adams describes "sides" of a village, which he defines as "all the members belonging to the same Crest who are localized there" (1973:23). To me, the concept of "sides" indicates a duality. In some Gitksan villages, like Gitsegukla, where Adams did much of his research, one could call the two "crests" found there "sides" but in other villages like Gitanmaax, Kispiox, and Kitwangax, where three "crests" reside, it is difficult to say the village has "sides"; and certainly the Gitksan would not say it. In addition, I have never heard of locally resident clan members described as a unit for any Gitksan social purpose. Houses act together regardless of the residence of individual members.

Next, Adams (1973:23) discusses **wilnadaahl**. He claims **wilnadaahl** own hunting grounds which are usually contiguous (1973:23). In fact, very clearly, **wilnadaahl** do not own anything; houses own the hunting grounds. He then says, "depending upon the size and productivity of the hunting grounds, a **wilnad'ahl** may have two or three subchiefs" (1973:25) who are each the chief of a house. As previously described, houses are not subdivisions of **wilnadaahl** or clans; and therefore, house chiefs cannot be seen as "subchiefs". Although there is a ceremonial ranking between houses in a clan within a village, this status

gives virtually no authority to one house over another. Houses are economically and politically independent units. Adams then claims that the "leading chief" (of the **wilnadaahl**) does not interfere in the direction of the "subsidiary allotments" unless he receives a complaint from a house member regarding their sub-subsidiary allotment (1973:25); which is a rather meaningless statement, considering that the "leading chief" is only a ceremonial leader who could not possibly "allot" something over which he has no authority whatsoever.

In the next paragraph, Adams continues in the previous vein when he states, "While the number of Houses in a **wilnad'ahl** is largely a function of the size and productivity of the hunting grounds, an effort is made by the village chiefs to maintain the same number of Houses in all the **wilnad'ahl** of the village" (1973:25). He goes on with a very spurious elaboration which I do not need to deal with because it is based on a very faulty premise. It is even difficult to deal with the initial statement because it has so many false assumptions, but I will try.

First, the number of houses in a **wilnadaahl** cannot be a "function of the size and productivity of the hunting grounds" because **wilnadaahl** is not related to land and

resource ownership. **Wilnadaahl** are the creation of historical circumstance; each house within it has a history which varies somewhat. Two or three houses within a **wilnadaahl** may have been one house in the ancient past, owning one territory or hunting ground; but new houses begin when a group leaves their house relatives and takes up new land, obtaining their own hunting grounds, so that the **wilnadaahl** which was once one house owning one hunting ground, is now three houses owing three hunting grounds. The **wilnadaahl**, by definition, is not a land owning group; while the house, by definition, is. Therefore, since the **wilnadaahl** does not own land, it cannot regulate the number of houses on its land. In the second half of the statement, Adams says that the number of Houses in each **wilnadaahl** in a village is regulated by the village chiefs. This is not possible because changing **wilnadaahl** membership would require changing history; or conversely, removing or adding houses which are members of the **wilnadaahl** resident in a village. I have never heard of the chiefs of village inviting a house with its own territory to move into the village or asking one to leave, to adjust **wilnadaahl** membership or for any other reason.

Cove (1987) names the four clans of the Gitksan, and says that their "membership is based on matrilineal descent"

(1987:17). With these statements I concur; but he then says that a clan "contains both individuals and HOUSES" (1987:17). I am not certain exactly what is meant by this. The reader may be left with the impression that an individual could belong to a clan but not be a house member. This is not so. The houses are composed of matrilineally related individuals, and those houses with the same major crest compose the clan. Alternatively, Cove could simply have meant that individuals belong to clans through house membership.

4. Village

Gitksan villages are usually located on major rivers such as the Skeena and Babine, very often at the confluence with another river of significant size. Gitanmaax is located at the confluence of the Skeena and Bulkley Rivers, Kispiox is located where the Skeena and Kispiox Rivers meet, Kitwangax is found where the Skeena and Kitwangax Rivers meet, and so on. When these villages were founded, the locations were chosen mainly because of ease of fishing and transportation. Today, transportation by river is not very significant but fishing is still essential. There would be other considerations as well, such as access to firewood

and spring water; but neither is very difficult to come by in Gitksan territory.

Each village is located on the territory of a particular chief, but that does not give him special status within the village. The ceremonial head chief of each village does not even need to be the owner of the territory the village sits on. Kispiox sits on Maus' territory, but the head chief or **miin simooget** is Geel; Gitanmaax is located on Spookxw's territory, but the **miin simooget** of the village is Gyed'mgaldo'o. The **miin simooget** changes over time as earned prestige rises and falls. The village site is essentially set off from the house-owned territory which surrounds it for the use of all village residents. In the past, this would be a very small area immediately surrounding the houses but today it is usually a larger area, often taken to be that area which was designated as reserve by the government. Occasional conflict arises between the traditional owner of a territory and the Indian agent or band council designation of ownership of a parcel of land.

Most of the current Gitksan villages are very old. For a long period of Gitksan history, many houses were located in a village called T'xemlax'amid. It seems that the

population was very large. The people sometimes describe T'xemlax'amid as a city or town rather than a village. There was probably a downturn in the climate which is described in the **adaa'ox** as a snowfall in summer and a resulting famine. The people were forced to disperse into smaller, more widely scattered groups. It was at that time that most of the current villages were founded. This may have occurred 4,000 years ago (Ryder 1987:1294; Ritchie, et al. 1983:127; Osborn and Luckman 1988:120-121).

Most of the villages of today are not in exactly the same location as they were immediately after the dispersal. The factors involved in the moves could be environmental or social. Kispiox, for example, has moved up and down the Kispiox river several times (Duff n.d.; Harris 1992). But it was at the dispersal that the founding houses came together, formed a village, and named it. It was also at the time of the dispersal that the present ownership of most of the territories was finalized. There were few major population shifts until European contact; even then, only village residence changed, not territorial ownership.

The composition of current villages is essentially a product of historical circumstance (see Appendix 4). The **adaa'ox** describe people settling the northwest who had a

moiety system from earliest times. These earliest people would be Wolf Clan men with their Raven Clan wives, or Raven Clan men with their Wolf Clan wives. These people would settle in two communities, often across the river from each other. Boas (1916:270) names an Eagle-Raven pairing; and an Eagle-Wolf (1916:306) pairing. Barbeau (n.d.d:42) names a Wolf-Raven pairing; and a Wolf-Eagle (n.d.d:99) pairing. This two-clan type of village organization can still be seen in Gitanmaax, Gitsegukla, and Kitwancool. A village might be founded by one house, or even a particular ancestor within a house as Kispiox was founded by Ya'il of the house of Gitluudaahlxw. The history of each village can be pieced together by tracing the history of each house found there. Wilson Duff (n.d.) recorded a very interesting **adaa'ox** from the late Jonathan Johnson, 'Wii Muu'gulsxw, of Kispiox, which traced five previous locations of Kispiox, the houses which composed the village, and the reasons for moving the village since the time of the dispersal from T'xemlax'amid.

Villages rarely acted as political or economic units. Houses were ordinarily independent political and economic units which were theoretically equal, although they were ranked for ceremonial purposes; and their wealth and esteem would rise and fall over time. Each house has a territory

with boundaries which are static. The fortunes of a house will rise and fall over time in that over a long history, a house might find itself with a large population and low resources at one time, and a small population and bountiful resources another time. Although each house strove to maintain a balance between resources and population by carefully controlling population and by judiciously managing resources, at times a house would find itself poor and at other times it would be wealthy. These rises and falls in wealth result in concomitant rises and falls in esteem and rank. The Gitksan do not see these changes as fortuitous, but as the result of hard work and generosity or the lack of them.

The three occasions on which the people of the entire village would most often act together would be the first salmon ceremony, fish weir building, and when the entire community is under attack. On other occasions, houses within the village, especially those closely related by clan or marriage, might join together temporarily for a specific purpose; but for the most part, houses were independent.

The members of each house in a village would probably be able to trace some kind of kinship with members of every

other house in the village if they knew the genealogies well enough. Each village and the Gitksan as a people are held together by common bonds of language, contiguous territory, history, and kinship, the last two being essentially the same thing for the Gitksan. A resident of a village is more likely to marry someone from his or her own village than from another village. In times past, this was more true for lower ranked people but not as true for higher ranked people, whose marriages may have been arranged with other high ranking families outside the village or even outside the nation to cement alliances.

The village of origin concept, previously mentioned, is still an essential characteristic of Gitksan social organization. The attachment of the Gitksan to their villages is very strong. Rarely will you hear a Gitksan person talk about his or her home as the "reserve", as you will in native communities in other parts of Canada. The villages are very ancient and primary to each individual's identity; while the "reserve" designation is very recent, and not very meaningful in the Gitksan scheme of existence. The village as "reserve" is seen as a fleeting moment in a very long history, while the village as a place of origin is seen as nearly eternal. Each village is seen as having ancient roots with a history of origin which can be traced

back for millennia even if the village has not actually been located in the same place. It is the idea of the village as a community of families related by clan and marriage which is the core of the way the Gitksan view their villages. The existence of the villages long into the future is seen as absolutely without doubt as well. This view of the village as "home" in the truest sense of the word makes Justice McEachern's statement that the Gitksan should "make their way off the reserves" (1991:300) to join mainstream society beyond consideration, and shows how little understanding he has of Gitksan history and social structure. In the Gitksan view, even if times are hard in the village now, it is temporary. Home is a safe haven which will always be there to shelter one, and the possibility of abandoning it forever is inconceivable.

V Rank

1. Individual Rank: Chiefs and the People

The Gitksan word for chief is **simooget**, the plural is **simgi'get**, and women chiefs are **sigid'm hanak**. **Simooget** and **simgi'get** can refer to both male and female chiefs, while **sigid'm hanak** is specific to female chiefs. **"Simooget"** has been literally translated by Cove as "real" person (Cove 1987:31; Cove and MacDonald 1987:X; Cove 1982:6). His translation has been accepted by several others (Seguin 1984:111; Guedon 1984a:139; Halpin 1973:285). I have not been able to find a Gitksan speaker who could accept that translation. There is no dispute about the meaning of **"get"** or **"gyet"**, which means "man" or "person"; but all those I spoke to had a hard time finding an English word which fit the meaning of **"sim"**. It seems to take several English words to approximate the meaning of**"sim"**. English words which come close include "significant", "important", and "powerful" (D. Harris 4/3/94). David Harris said, "The chief is called **simooget** like the cedar tree is called **simgan** (**gan** = wood or tree) because they are both so important to the people." He also said the **simooget** is considered "the eyes of the people" because like the eyes of an individual, he is so essential,

so central, so important. It may be that those Ts'imsian speakers who translated "**sim**" as "real" actually meant "really" as in "intensely so". A Gitksan **simooget** is a Gitksan but more intensely so than other Gitksan.

Each Gitksan house has a set of names. Many of these names, with their translations, have been recorded by Barbeau and Beynon in the 1920s, by Duff in the 1950s, and by Neil Sterritt during the decade preceding the declaration of the land claim in 1984. I recorded more while doing the genealogical research. Susan Marsden sorted the names gathered from these and other sources by house and recorded them in the chiefs' binders created to compile information for the use of each house. It is gratifying to know that the compilation of names in the chiefs' binders has been put to practical use by some houses which are using names again which they have not used for decades. When we took these names back to the houses to confirm them, we often heard, "I haven't heard that name for years; I had forgotten it."

Each house has names for children, usually separated into boys' names and girl's names; names for young men and young women; adults names which are not ranked; ranked names of the chief's advisors, called **gaak**; and the highest chief's

name. The highest chief is called the **'wii simooget** or "great chief". The ranking of the names within a house is not set in stone. It can be affected by the behaviour of the name holder. If the name holder works hard to uphold the name by fulfilling all chiefly responsibilities well, the name can rise in rank; but this is a slow process, usually inter-generational. If a name holder disgraces a name, it can decline in rank quickly; and it will take time for the next holder of the name to do enough good work to "wipe off the shame" put on that name.

Because of the flexibility in the system of rank, the highest ranking name in a house may change over time, or a house may be known by more than one name. For example, a Kispiox Fireweed House which is now usually known as the house of Gwiiyeehl was known as the House of X̲antxw earlier in this century. This shifting rank of names also results in houses being known by more than one name at the same time, because the shift in rank between names is gradual. I have also heard the Fireweed house just mentioned called **"wilps Gwiiyeehl gaanhl X̲antxw"**, the house of Gwiiyeehl and X̲antxw. There are many other examples of houses known by two names, or the name of which has changed in recent decades.

Next in rank to the **'wii simooget** in each house are the **gaak**. "**Gaak**" means "wings" in Gitxsanimx. These chiefs vary in number between houses from two to thirteen. They act as advisors to the **'wii simooget**, participating in decision making with him concerning house business. The **gaak** are said to support the **'wii simooget** like the wings of a bird support its flight. They are sometimes called the "branches", implying the chief is the trunk of the tree. I have also heard it said that the **'wii simooget** is like the peak of the mountain while the **gaak** are mountains adjoined to the peak on either side. All of these metaphors indicate that the **'wii simooget** is central but the **gaak** are also essential. In feast hall seating, the metaphor becomes graphic in that the chief sits in the center with wings seated by rank on each side of him.

The seating in the feast hall indicates the rank of each of the participants. Traditionally, the highest ranked chief of the highest ranked house would sit in the position of honour opposite the door, underneath the central roof beam. His **gaak** would sit on either side of him. Each house would be arranged this way, in two or three rows, around the traditional cedar plank dwelling by rank, the higher ranked houses closer to the back of the building, the lower ranked houses closer to the door.

In recent decades, since the old feast houses are gone, the Gitksan hold feasts in their community halls, seated at tables. With the use of tables, seating by rank has been maintained but the pattern has changed somewhat. In the eastern villages of Kispiox and Gitanmaax, the seating is arranged differently than in the western villages of Kitsegukla, Kitwangax, and Kitwancool. In both east and west, the houses are seated by rank, highest at the center and back of the dwelling, lowest by the door. Also, in both east and west, a large house may have a table (which is actually four or five long tables placed together and seating dozens of people) to itself, while two to five small houses may be seated at one table. When more than one house is seated together, it is because they are closely related, **wilnadaahl**. When such a seating arrangement is made, the relative ranking of the chiefs of those houses has to be judged against each other as if they were one house. What is different in the seating arrangement between eastern and western Gitksan villages is that in the east, chiefs' heirs sit in their ranked or unranked positions down the table from the chief sitting at the head, while in the west, the heirs will sit across from their "uncles". This seating maintains the traditional pattern of the heir sitting at his uncle's feet in the feast so that he can hear all his uncle hears and learn all

his uncle learns.

Traditionally, only the **'wii simooget** and his **gaak** attended feasts; but in recent years, people of all ranks and ages attend feasts. Sometimes even children attend, which garners the disapproval of some because very serious business is dealt with at feasts, they are very long and tiring, and children tend to become restless and noisy. Even though feasts typically last from six o'clock in the evening until one, two, or three in the morning, proper feast etiquette is to remain seated throughout the entire event. In fact, moving quietly about while there is a lull in the proceedings is considered acceptable today; but children running around is not.

The people without chiefs' names, the **laxgi'get**, ordinary people, are seated in the middle and at the lower end of the table towards the door. The money, food, and goods given at the feast are distributed in accordance with rank, personal accomplishment in the feast and the community, relationship to those putting on the feast, and any services which might have been rendered to the hosts. It requires an enormous amount of knowledge to know exactly how the distribution to the witnesses should be arranged. Outside the feast hall, in their houses, the **laxgi'get** will

be treated in a similar manner in that they will be treated with respect as members of the family; their opinions will have some weight, but not as much as that of the chiefs.

2. Rank Between Houses

Gitksan houses within a village are ranked, but this is essentially a ceremonial ranking. Houses are politically and economically independent, with very little power to interfere in the business of other houses. The ranking of houses within a village mainly determines where each house is seated in the feast hall. This ranking changes in the same manner as the rank of individual names changes, slowly over time by means of accomplishments. Those individuals and houses which act in a chiefly manner, with dignity, respect, and generosity, are the ones which rise in rank. I have seen one house change its seating place in the feast hall in the last few years. This house put up a big feast, the chiefs saying that their family had acted honourably and generously and deserved to be treated with more respect. Thereafter they sat in a position closer to the back of the feast hall. This move, like all other important decisions, was validated in a feast.

The highest ranked chief of the highest ranked house in the village is called the **'miin simooget**. The **'miin simooget** is essentially a ceremonial position with no real authority beyond the ordinary power of a house chief. If he speaks on behalf of the village, it is not because he alone has made a decision on behalf of all the houses in the village, but the speech is more likely to be in the nature of an announcement of a decision reached by all the chiefs of the village. In any case, the houses of a village do not often act together other than to welcome visitors, or when there is an outside threat.

3. Rank, Wealth, Power, and Prestige

Writers concerned with social hierarchy in northwest coast societies often describe a class system or, a system with firmly entrenched ranks. Garfield and Wingert said the interests of chiefs were "class interests" (1951:27), the "Tribal chiefs and the members of their lineages were especially privileged upper class men and women" (1951:27), and "Class was a matter of birth" (1951:28). Adams (1973:37-8) followed a similar line of argument specifically for the Gitksan. Such writers describe a system with classes of "royalty", "nobility", "commoners",

and slaves. This four class system is often claimed for the "Tsimshian", meaning all those speaking dialects of the Ts'imsian language, including the Gitksan.

In fact, the Gitksan had a system of rank but did not have a class system. While the Gitksan were more democratic than the Ts'imsian, I expect that even the Ts'imsian did not actually have a class system although they were closer to it than were the Gitksan. From her study of the oral histories, Marsden (1987) has surmised that in the last millennium or so, the Ts'imsian Eagle house of Legaix and the Killerwhale house of Ts'iibasaa began to consolidate their power through momopolization of important trade routes and by exchanging marriage partners quite consistently. These two houses became more powerful than any others among the Ts'imsian speakers, mainly through trade monopolies on the Skeena. I believe they approached but did not attain a class system because they were not exclusive in their intermarriage; position was not guaranteed by birth but still had to be earned; nephews, nieces, or cousins of the chief might be **laxgi'get** (commoners); and they continued to accumulate wealth solely for the purpose of distribution, not to consume or to free them from labour. Even this level of consolidation of power in the hands of a few houses or chiefs did not occur

among the Gitksan.

The idea that wealth inevitably concentrates in fewer and fewer hands and that this concentration inevitably leads to a class above all others is a Western one. Even among the Ts'imsian, at no time was wealth ever accumulated for any other reason than to give it away. It is only by distribution of wealth that one is able to attain and maintain status. Generosity and chiefliness are nearly synonymous, while stinginess is the antithesis of chiefliness. The rise in levels of consumption for "wealthy" chiefs was minimal; and almost entirely related to increasing prestige in the community, such as a bigger house to hold more potlatch guests, and more masks and crest poles to display. It must also be understood that house solidarity was usually great. The chief nearly always acted with his house members in mind. His greatest obligation was their welfare. A chief, both literally and figuratively, was "feeding the people all the time". Far from being a leisured class, chiefs were expected to work harder than anyone. Any chief who failed to work hard and be generous would enter a downward spiral; as his esteem fell, his supporters within his house would shift their support to another high ranking house member, because their chief's status is their status.

Writers concerned with west coast societies frequently miss the point that **simgi'get** and **laxgi'get** belong to the same house. One house may be higher in rank than another, but all houses are ranked, all houses have chiefs, and all houses have property. The chief, his sister's son, and his mother's mother's mother's sister's daughter's daughter's daughter's son all live under the same the roof. The chief's sister's son is most likely to inherit from his uncle and the chief's more distantly related "nephew" is most likely to remain **laxgi'get** but the chief calls all young men of his house **guslis'm gyet** (nephew). If the chief's sister's son does not live up to expectations and the more distant relative does, the sister's son will be passed over and the more distant relative may inherit his **nibip's** (uncle's) chief's name, thereby being elevated from **laxgi'get** to **simooget**. This system is too flexible to fit the definition of a class system.

VI Kinship

One of the functions of a kinship system is to distinguish kin from non-kin. The Gitksan kinship system does this, of course; but in a somewhat different way than most Westerners are used to thinking of kinship. On the one hand, an individual Gitksan might say, "I am not related to that person," referring to someone from a different village, a different clan, and with no known relationship by marriage. On the other hand, the same individual might say, "All Gitksan are related," which is no doubt true given enough genealogical information.

To the Gitksan, the relevant criterion for the distinction of relatives is between house/clan and non-clan members. Biologically, one is equally related to one's mother's sister's child and father's sister's child. From a bilateral perspective they are equally kin but to a Gitksan they are not. Gitksan consider cousins on their mother's side to be the same as siblings where cousins on the father's side are preferred marriage partners. Gitksan can be heard to say, "They are my father's relatives.", intimating the perception of a separate set of relatives for father and self.

1. **Wilksiwitxw**

As previously described, **wilksiwitxw** is one's father's house. To be a complete human being, each individual must have a **wilp** and a **wilksiwitxw**. The **wilp** is responsible for meeting most of the needs of each of its members, but the **wilksiwitxw** has essential roles as well. The **wilksiwitxw** fulfils both the biological and social role of father in most cases. The house of a person's biological father is always his or her **wilksiwitxw**, even if the social father is from another house. A person's **wilksiwitxw** is never changed through adoption or any other process the way house membership can be changed. Illegitimacy in the Western sense does not exist among the Gitksan, because everyone has a biological mother, and it is from that connection that primary social definition derives. Everyone also has a biological father, and rarely is that father unknown. Even if the relationship between the biological parents was of very short duration, the father's house is usually the child's accepted **wilksiwitxw**. If the father of the child is unknown or is not Gitksan, the child's mother's **wilksiwitxw** becomes the child's **wilksiwitxw**. I have even heard of cases where it was necessary to go back two generations to the mother's mother's father's house for a **wilksiwitxw**, because for two generations the fathers had

been non-Gitksan.

The role of the **wilksiwitxw** is an important one for every individual. Traditionally children were raised in the dwelling of their father, educated and supported physically and emotionally by his relatives. Today, most children are raised in nuclear family dwellings; but they continue to receive love and support from members of their **wilksiwitxw** as well as members of their **wilp**. It is not entirely unusual for some children to spend more time with and receive more support from their father's relatives than from their own. This situation might occur when they live in a village which is not that of their own **wilp**.

The importance of the role of the **wilksiwitxw** is never more obvious than at the time of death. When a Gitksan dies, his **wilksiwitxw** is responsible for providing many funeral services, for which they are repaid by his **wilp**. The more important of these services include buying the casket, buying the burial clothes, sitting with the body around the clock from the time of death until the burial, and digging the grave by hand.

The formal duties of the **wilksiwitxw** today are not as many as they once were. In the past, and in some families

today, a child's father's brother was responsible for making (buying, today) his cradle. A child's baby name will be a hereditary name owned by his **wilp** but may have an addendum which refers to the clan of his father such as "Hopping Offspring of the Wolf (Frog, etcetera)". Today the role of the father's house remains strongly supportive and educational.

The role of the **wilksiwitxw** continues throughout life and beyond. As Mary Johnson, Antgwulilibiksxw, put it, referring to the cradle and the casket, "Your **wilksiwitxw** buys your first cradle and your last" (1985). The role of an individual's **wilksiwitxw** will be recognized formally in the feast hall in front of hundreds of witnesses beyond death for a generation or two when a nephew or niece or great nephew or niece takes the deceased's name.

VII Marriage

While recording genealogical data, I sometimes had to make a judgement call on whether a relationship constituted a marriage or not. A marriage obviously existed if it had been formalized in either the traditional Gitksan manner or within Canadian law, but other cases were not so clear. Generally I considered a relationship a marriage for the purposes of the genealogies if it produced children, or if it was of some duration. I usually judged a childless relationship of a year or two to be a marriage; but this was largely a judgement call on my part, substantiated by the fact that Gitksan would usually call such a relationship a marriage at that point or likely sooner.

The relationship between an individual Gitksan and his biological parents is always recognized regardless of the situation. Regardless of who raises a child, his house membership always comes from his biological mother; and that can only be changed by a formal adoption in the feast hall, even if a child was raised from birth by a member of a house not his own. The situation is similar for the **wilksiwitxw** in that one's biological father's house is always one's **wilksiwitxw** if the father is known. **Wilksiwitxw** cannot be changed by adoption the way **wilp** is

changed on occasion.

1. Gaats

The Gitksan do not have marriage prescriptions, but they do have marriage proscriptions and marriage preferences. The essential law regulating the choice of marriage partners for the Gitksan is the rule of clan exogamy, the proscription against marriage within the clan. This is called **gaats** by the Gitksan. Technically, a person can marry anyone who is not a member of his own clan; but there is a cross-cousin preference, a preference for marriage into one's father's house.

Gaats is considered a serious offense. In the past it was considered so serious as to merit banishment or even death. Several **adaa'ox** describe the dire consequences of such an act. **Gaats** has started wars, caused murders, and resulted in banishment in the past. Today, the consequences are not as dire; but are still serious. A **gaats** marriage will cause continuous embarrassment, diminish social status, and cause social and ceremonial confusion that will last at least until all offspring of the **gaats** marriage are dead and buried. The confusion referred to results because, as

was previously mentioned, certain burial services are provided by one's **wilksiwitxw** while others are provided by one's own house and clan, so one's father's house must be different from one's own. All relationships in the feast hall are seen as reciprocating ones, so it is impossible to be both giver and receiver at the same time.

With consequences of this kind and endurance, **gaats** marriages are not common today, even after a century of overt and covert attempts at acculturation of the Gitksan by Canadian society. It is not surprising that the prohibition against **gaats** is still largely adhered to today, because an important part of each Gitksan's educational process is frequent lessons from older relatives about who is and who is not a "relative", meaning eligible marriage partner. Young people, especially those approaching marriageable age, are frequently warned against getting too friendly with those whose clan makes them inappropriate marriage partners. A common lament of young people is, "Everyone is my cousin!"

Another important factor encouraging clan-appropriate marriage is community criticism. Those who marry within their clan are frequently whispered about, pointed at, and at times openly confronted. The shame reflects on older

relatives who had the responsibility to socialize the offenders properly.

As was alluded to before, the most serious and enduring consequence of a **gaats** marriage is the disruption it causes in the feast. During a feast, the actions of everyone attending are dictated by relationships to other actors. The most basic aspects of functioning within the feast are determined by kin relationships. Those relationships determine if and where one sits, if one gives or receives, how much is given, why it is given, and to whom it is given. If an individual has made a **gaats** marriage or is the product of a **gaats** marriage, this entire system of complex relationships is irresolvably confused; no matter what effort is made to correct the problem, it can never be completely accomplished. To mitigate the embarrassment of a **gaats** relationship, two same-clan marriage partners may take turn going to the feast; or they may go only when their clan is giving a feast, so that they do not have to "sit down together' or "sit on each other's laps". I have seen same-clan marriage partners who attended a feast their clan is giving avoiding each other by staying as far apart in the feast hall as possible, as if to make it less obvious they are both fulfilling the same role of givers in the feast, when a husband and wife should play opposite

roles unless a third clan is giving the feast. The reciprocation of husband and wife in the feast hall can be very obvious, because a spouse often serves food to his or her partner's table. This, of course, can never happen if they both fulfil the same roles at all feasts.

As well as causing two or three generations of frequently embarrassing and confusing incidents, a **gaats** marriage can affect an individual's status within the Gitksan social system. A person who is **gaats** very rarely attains a high ranking position. I have attended a feast where a house chose a **gaats** person to take a high ranking position, and the other members of his clan showed their disapproval by contributing far less than is usual for the investiture of a high chief. The feast contributions were more like what would usually be contributed at the death of a child or a person with no name.

One method for handling **gaats**, of a self-imposed variety, is that those involved in a **gaats** relationship often do not marry legally, as if not admitting that they have a marriage relationship. Another not too uncommon a situation in **gaats** relationships is for a young couple to abandon the **gaats** relationship and have a "serious" marriage at maturity. No doubt, in many such cases, the

young couple is bowing to family and community pressure to correct the situation before it is too late.

Some people or their families attempt to remedy a **gaats** relationship by adopting one partner into another clan, but this action cannot completely ameliorate the situation. Important problems still remain. Such problems include: If the mother is adopted, do the children go with her? If they do not, they are different clans from their mother, a very difficult and irregular situation. Who is their **wilksiwitxw**? Does the adopted person function in both clans/houses or is he or she expected not to contribute support to loved ones in time of need? The list of social and ceremonial difficulties created by such a situation is long.

The only type of **gaats** relationship which seems not to be taken too seriously is a relationship between two elderly people long past child-bearing age. The consequences of **gaats** between two elderly people do not have inter-generational effects, so these relationships are often politely ignored. It is when offspring are produced from a **gaats** relationship that the system is upset by producing the impossible situation of the child's **wilp** and **wilksiwitxw** being the same. For elderly couples producing

no offspring, the relationship may be seen only as companionship in old age. Although such a case of **gaats** may be seen as the least harmful, even these relationships receive some criticism. I once heard it expressed of such a relationship that an elderly man could not be considered for the highest chief's name in his house because of his **gaats** marriage.

There seem to be degrees of prohibition in **gaats** marriages. A marriage between two elderly people in the same clan falls at the low end of the scale of forbiddeness, as would a marriage between a Gitksan of a certain clan and a person of another nation belonging to the equivalent clan. A Gitksan Gisgaast (Killerwhale) marrying a Wet'suwet'en Laxsamasyu (Killerwhale) or a Ts'imsian Gispeewuwadee (Killerwhale) would be an example.

Most **gaats** marriages among Gitksan of recent years fall in a middle level of interdiction. These are marriages between people of two Houses of the same clan which are not known to have a very close relationship. These would often be houses from different villages that may only share a very ancient history.

If intra-clan marriage is uncommon, intra-house marriage is

extraordinary. I can only recall two such marriages from my genealogical research; and in both cases the couples were from very large houses, where the biological relationship between the marriage partners was unknown, and it was even possible to argue that they were from different houses.

The greatest degree of abhorrence is reserved for the marriage of house members so closely related that the actual biological relationship is known, as in the case of a man marrying his sister or first, second, or third maternal cousin. I know of no such marriage having occurred among the Gitksan in this century.

Children of **gaats** marriage are the only ones in Gitksan society who could be considered to approach the idea of "illegitimacy". The taint of **gaats** stays with a person born of such a union throughout life. Such a person is unlikely to attain high rank. Although house membership obtained from one's mother is primary, the relationship to the father's house and the life-long reciprocation involved is also important, especially for a person of high rank. To function properly in Gitksan society, one must be made of two halves, one's own **wilp** and one's "come out" or **wilksiwitxw**.

2. Cross-cousin Marriage

A well as a marriage prohibition, the Gitksan have a marriage preference as well: cross-cousin marriage. They call it **nax'm gutga'oo**, spouse-cross-cousin. The way the Gitksan express it is by saying, "You should marry into your father's house." "You" refers to either male or female; therefore either matrilateral or patrilateral cross-cousin marriage fulfils the preference. The cousins the Gitksan are referring to and the cousins to whom I refer are not necessarily "first cousins"; FZD or FZS. The Gitksan do not distinguish between "first, second or third cousins" and so on in their kinship terms; MZD, MMSDD, MMMZDD are all called by the kinship term for "sister". They do not distinguish socially between their cousins within a house other than the fact that close biological relatives such as "first cousins" do not marry very often. When they refer to marrying a cousin, they are usually referring to a "third or fourth cousin". Because the only marriage prohibition, other than to close paternal relatives such as father or father's father, is within the clan (MZS/D, MMZDS/D), even parallel cousins can be married as long as they are paternal (FBS/D) and do not happen to be in one's own clan (because father's wife is also a member of ego's clan).

In anthropological analyses of cross-cousin marriage in matrilineal societies, when a man marries his patrilateral cross-cousin (FZD), he is seen as furthering an alliance with his father's kin group (Rosman and Rubel 1971:8). When a man makes a matrilateral cross-cousin marriage (MBD), he is marrying the daughter of his maternal uncle from whom he inherits, thus enhancing his personal position rather than that of his kin group. For a woman, patrilateral cross-cousin marriage (FZS) cements the relationship between two kin groups because the woman marrying into her father's kin group will continue, along with her children, to reside on her father's territory, maintaining the relationship between the two kin groups for another generation. The patrilateral cross-cousin (FZS) marriage of a woman maintains an alliance only if her parents were married cousins.

Rosman and Rubel (1971:7) argue that, unlike most other peoples of the northwest coast, the Gitksan and Ts'imsian marry their matrilateral cross-cousins instead of their patrilateral cross-cousins. Examination of the Gitksan genealogies indicates that the Gitksan actually do both, and this practice indicates the power of women in Gitksan society. In a society in which women were relatively powerless, one would not expect to find a preference for

matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. When a woman marries into her father's house it is her marriage that maintains the alliance between houses, her husband's marriage alliance being of a more personal nature, maintaining the alliance between himself and the man from whom he will inherit. The husband's marriage is not necessarily a marriage which will maintain the relationship between two houses because the cousin he marries, his MBD, could be from any house of a clan which is different from his. Such a marriage would maintain the relationship between the man and his father's house only if a cross-cousin marriage had also been made in the previous generation.

The relationship between two houses may be maintained through several marriages; it is not solely in the hands of two individuals. Examination of the Gitksan genealogies indicates that most houses have another house with which they marry far more often than would be expected by chance. Depending on the clan, the members of a Gitksan house may have up to 45 other houses as well as a limitless number of non-Gitksan to chose among as marriage partners, yet even today, in the marriages; of young people, the traditional marriage alliances can be seen. Although the marriages of young people are no longer overtly arranged by older family members, and in spite of the fact that many young people

are not even aware that there is a traditional preference for cross-cousin marriage, the influence is still evident in the continuation of traditional marriage patterns. Parents can often be heard telling their children from their youngest years which cousin they should marry. This is usually done in a joking manner, but there is a traditional marriage rule behind it.

Because houses range in size from 25 or so up to over 300, the larger houses often have two or three houses with which they intermarry frequently. For example, the Kispiox Fireweed house of Ts'iibasaa has about 200 members. It therefore intermarries regularly with Kispiox Wolf house, 'Niist, Kispiox Wolf house, 'Wii Muu'gulsxw, and Gitanmaax Frog house Ts'oogooslee.

The actual number of marriages between two houses may not, in some cases, indicate the strength of the relationship between them. In some instances, a house may marry with two or three closely related houses in the same **wilnadaahl**. Or, one lineage in a large house may marry mainly with a particular house, while another lineage of the large house may marry with a third house. Such is the case with Ts'iibasaa house mentioned in the last paragraph.

The phenomenon of repeated intermarriage between two houses occurs when two houses develop a mutually advantageous relationship, which is often expressed by the Gitksan as "helping each other out". When two people marry, they contribute to the economic well-being of each other's house, both in daily living and in the feast system, where spousal support can be significant. The alliance of two houses by marriage gives each individual an additional body of resources to draw upon. Marriage does not grant automatic access to the resources of one's spouse's house, but such resources are very rarely withheld from the spouse of a house member or the children of male house members. This privileged access to resources can be very important, because resources are not evenly distributed among territories; and they vary from season to season. Having the opportunity to access resources belonging to houses to which one is connected by marriage (spouse's, father's, father's father's, mother's brother's wife's, etcetera) helps to make distribution of resources more equitable. Once a valuable reciprocating relationship has been established between two houses, the desire to maintain it through further marriages is often there.

The marriage alliances made by some individuals are more important than those made by others. The marriages of high

ranking individuals usually have greater importance for the house than those of low ranked house members. The marriages of high ranking people were, traditionally, very clearly political alliances. Today, some of the political element remains in the marriages of high ranked people, in that houses allied by such a marriage can form a powerful block of influence in community affairs. Certainly, the economic importance of such alliances remains, in that the chief of a house generally has the power to allow any or all the members of the house to which he is married access to the resources of his house. In the marriage of a low ranked person, he could reasonably only give permission for use of his house resources to his spouse, children, and possibly a few close in-laws such as his brothers and sisters-in-law and his mother and father-in-law.

The marriage of a couple who have many children can also do more to cement the alliance of two houses. If a couple has many children, all those children will claim the important relationship of **wilksiwitxw** to their father's house.

One interesting consequence of Gitksan cross-cousin marriage is that a man's wife can inherit his father's name, or a woman's husband can inherit her father's name. This is not unusual, and a person in such a situation might

joke, "I married my own father." A similar joke might be made if the spouse had a name previously held by a grandfather, grandmother, or another relative.

Cross-cousin marriage can also result in the situation in which a man's son's child can inherit his name. This event could occur when cross-cousin marriages have occurred in two generations. This pattern may look like patrilineal inheritance in alternating generations but the Gitksan see this event as very distinct. It is only through two generations of inheritance from a man to his sister's son that it can occur.

Gitksan kinship terms indicate that cross-cousin marriage is the preferred marriage. Some kinship terms used to refer to members of a person's **wilksiwitxw** also refer to other people who may or may not be members of that person's **wilksiwitxw**. If the cross-cousin marriage preference has been exercised, these "others" are, in fact, **wilksiwitxw**. One example is **k'ahlaan**, which is used to refer to one's father's brother and one's mother's sister's husband. These two relatives can be different people; but if a cross-cousin marriage has occurred, one's father's brother is one's mother's sister's husband. There are other such examples. **Nibip** refers to mother's brother and to father's

sister's husband, who are the same person if one's parents are married cousins. **Wak** is used to indicate a man's mother's sister's son and his father's brother's son, who are one person if one's mother's sister is married to one's father's brother. **Nixdaa**, **hlgiikxw**, and **gimxdii** all have similar implications.

3. Levirate and Sororate

The levirate and the sororate are practised by the Gitksan. Surprisingly, this practise does not seem to have declined much with time and outside influence. When I began the genealogical research, and elders told me that the traditional practise had been to marry again into the same house if one's spouse died, I did not expect to find this practice occurring recently, just as I had not expected to find cross-cousin marriages still occurring. In fact, the tendency to practise the levirate and sororate was even stronger than that towards cross-cousin marriage. Widows and widowers today often marry into the house of their deceased spouse. The first and second spouse may actually be brothers or sisters; or they may be uncle-nephew, aunt-niece, cousins or even mother-daughter. In the last case, of which there were three evident in the genealogies, the

man's second wife is not his daughter but his deceased wife's daughter by a previous marriage.

The elders say that when the spouse of a young person dies, he or she should marry into the same house. It is easy to understand why the levirate and sororate were practised traditionally when marriages were contracts made between two kin groups. If a satisfactory arrangement made between two houses came to an untimely conclusion because of the death of one of the spouses, the deceased spouse was replaced by his or her kinship unit so that the relationship could be continued. That the practise has continued among young people, sometimes without their overt awareness of it, like cross-cousin marriage, indicates that the influence of traditional marriage patterns and older relatives continues to be greater than young people are aware of. Few young people would say they remarried in their deceased spouse's house for any reason other than coincidence.

The practise of the levirate and sororate is indicated by kinship terms. For example, "**k'ahlaan**" is used for father's brother as well as some other relatives in one's **wilksiwitxw**, and for "step father" when the mother's second husband is from the same house as her first husband.

4. Other Factors Limiting Marriage Choice

Traditionally, Gitksan marriages were not arrangements made by two individuals but were corporate arrangements made between two groups for political, economic, and social reasons. Marriages were made to benefit far more people, including future generations, than the two most immediately concerned. It is not that the couple had no say in the decision, but they were likely to perceive what was good for the two families as being good for themselves as well.

Arranged marriages were on the decline but not too uncommon in the last two generations. Some of these marriages worked out; others did not. I have heard of a few occasions upon which marriages were overtly arranged by families in recent years. Such marriages of which I am aware were not successful. In spite of the fact that marriages are rarely, if ever, arranged today, traditional marriage patterns were still evident on the genealogies.

Another factor which influences Gitksan marriage partner choice today is rank. The Gitksan say, "The children of chiefs marry the children of chiefs." This pattern was probably followed rigidly in the past. Mary Johnson, Antgwulilibiksxw, told me a story of how a high ranked

woman who married a low ranked man was so ashamed when a feast was held and her husband had to stand by the door (a lowly position), that she committed suicide (1986).

Today, the consequences of inter-rank marriage are not so dire; but the traditional pattern of those of high rank marrying others of high rank is still followed, at least to some degree. The genealogies demonstrated this practice clearly. This pattern is very strong for those over sixty, and is not as obvious among younger people; but this difference may not necessarily indicate a decline in the trend because a lower ranked person married to a higher ranked person may not have attained the status he or she will eventually attain. It is not unusual for a person over sixty to take a higher name. A house chief of forty is considered a young chief.

The lag in attainment of rank by one marriage partner may also indicate a feature of inheritance, in that choice of marriage partner affects rank. A person who marries a chief or a chief's heir is more likely to be chosen by his house to take a high ranked name. The two elements reinforce each other: a high ranking person is supposed to marry a high ranking person; and if he or she does, he or she is more likely to become high ranking.

It is not just chiefs who marry same-ranked people in Gitksan society. Those of the lowest rank, those without names, are likely to marry each other as well. For a person with no name to marry a person with a low ranked name would not be unusual, and for a person with a high name to marry someone with a somewhat lower name would not be unusual; but for a chief to marry a nameless person would be unusual. It seems that it is more appropriate for a chief to marry a respectable person who is entirely outside the system than to marry a low ranked Gitksan. A chief's spouse who is not Gitksan will nearly always be adopted by another house and given a respectable position in the system; but if a person who is Gitksan has not been deemed worthy of a name and rank by their house, that person may not be an appropriate marriage partner for a chief.

Another factor affecting marriage choice is geographical location. Most commonly, Gitksan marry within their own village. There is also a marked tendency for Gitksan to marry within two groups, either within the western villages of Kispiox, Glen Vowel, and Gitanmaax, or the eastern villages of Kitsegukla, Kitwangax, and Kitwancool. Gitksan also frequently marry Wet'suwet'en, Nisga'a, Ts'imsian, and

non-natives; and, to a lesser degree Haida, Kitimaat, Kwagulth, Tahltan, and Cree.

5. Post-Marital Residence

The traditional post-marital residence rule of the Gitksan was avunculocal. Upon marriage, a young couple would be most likely to live in the dwelling of his matrilineal kinship unit or house. The chief of the house may be the young man's mother's brother or a more distant matrilineal relative such as MMB, MMZS, or MMMZDS. My husband's maternal aunt, Mary Johnson, told me that "in the old days" my husband, children and I would have lived in her brother's house. Mary's brother, Stanley Wilson, is Ts'iibasaa, the chief of their house.

As was previously mentioned, children were usually born and raised in the dwelling of their fathers' house. For many, especially those of the lower ranks, their mother's and father's village of origin would be the same, making it easy to maintain close ties with their own house even if living with their father's house. If a woman married outside her village of origin, she and her children would maintain ties with their own house through frequent visits

home. They would also go home for all feasts, which were always held in the dwelling of the house to which they belonged regardless of usual place of residence.

Some women may never have actually lived in the dwelling of their own house. Such a woman would be born in her father's dwelling; and, at marriage, go to her husband's dwelling, where she might live out the rest of her life. Other women might live in their own house dwelling for a time before they married, after a divorce, or after becoming widowed.

It would be unusual, though, for a man not to live in the dwelling belonging to his house. Most young men, especially those of high rank, left their father's house at puberty to complete their education with their maternal uncles and to take their place as men of their house. A man of lower rank might live for a time with his wife's family if his family was short of resources or room, or if her family had plentiful resources or low population. In such a situation, the man's father-in-law or wife's maternal uncle might allow him to use part of his territory, saying, "I am allowing my daughter's (niece's) husband to use this land to feed my grandchildren."

Today, most people live in nuclear family units, sometimes with another relative or two, such as an elderly parent or grandparent or a niece, nephew, or grandchild. It is most common that a couple will live in the husband's village of origin, just as in the past; but they might also live in the wife's village or the village of the father of either half of the couple. The situation of a couple living in the village of one of their fathers has arisen because of the government definition of band membership. Until 1985, band membership was usually defined patrilineally, except in the case of illegitimate children. According to the government, a registered Indian has the right to live only on the reserve of the band to which he or she belongs. This policy has resulted in many Gitksan living in their father's village rather than their own. They are almost always aware that it is not their own village; and many talk about "moving back home" to their village of origin, even if they have never lived there. The tie to their village of origin will always be maintained through visits to relatives, most of whom will likely live in their own village; and for formal house events such as feasts, which are rarely held anywhere except in the village of origin of the house putting on the event. Many house members raised in their father's village, do move to their own village of origin.

Those who do not live in their own village sometimes suffer abuse for it. A not uncommonly heard insult is, "You don't even belong here (the village)." It is seen as important to live in one's own village for anyone, but essential for those of high rank. Chiefs must live in their own village so that they are available to take care of house business. Chiefs are not just needed at the time of feasts and other important occasions; but are expected to be available to help and advise house members, clan members, affines, or anyone who seeks help, whenever they need it. In fact, it is rare for a chief to reside in a village not his or her own.

Post-marital residence in matrilineal societies has long been a topic of discussion by anthropologists (Fox 1967:97; Keesing 1975:62; Schneider and Gough 1961:9). They often see the "matrilineal problem" (Richards 1950:277) as an inherent conflict between a woman's husband and brother over her and her children. This perceived conflict is the result of a patrilineal bias in which women and children must be seen as the property of a man. From the matrilineal perspective, there is an inherent conflict in a patrilineal system which expects a woman to give up her allegiance to her mother's family for that of her

husband's, and to change allegiance once again if she remarries.

To the Gitksan there is no conflict between a husband and a brother over a woman and her children; the wife and children unequivocally belong to the wife's brother's kin group, just as the husband knows with certainty that his sister and her children belong unequivocally to his kin group. The roles of the husband and father are seen as complementary. It is a fact of life that a Gitksan child is born in the dwelling of his father, and that he will probably go to live out his life in his maternal uncle's house. For the Gitksan, this is no more a source of stress or conflict than is the custom in patrilineal societies of a woman leaving her father's house to go live with her husband.

Even though most children left their father's home for that of their maternal uncles, the relationship with the father and his house was always maintained. The bond between a child and his father's relatives, his **wilksiwitxw**, was in the past, and is today, usually a strong emotional and spiritual bond as well as being a legal and ceremonial bond. As was described before, there are roles in Gitksan society which can only be fulfilled by one's father's

relatives; so the relationship between a person and his father's house is one which lasts a lifetime and longer.

6. Divorce

As in most matrilineal societies, divorce was not forbidden in Gitksan society; and was not greatly difficult to undertake. It could be initiated by either partner if he or she felt wronged. Divorce was not undertaken too lightly, though, because considerable emotional, social, and economic investment was involved in a marriage.

Within the Gitksan system, divorce, like all important matters, is verified in a feast. Divorce is important because it signifies the partial severing of relations between two kinship units. I say partial, because any children of that union will still be associated with the house of their father as their **wilksiwitxw**. The divorce feast is called **bitxw**. **Bitxw** are not held very often today but I have attended one.

Any wronged person can divorce his or her spouse by putting up a divorce feast. The divorce feast not only rids a person of their spouse but rids them of the shame put upon

them by the unacceptable behaviour of that spouse. The one being divorced is supposed to attend the **bitxw** and listen with good humour while he or she is ridiculed by the soon-to-be-former spouse in a song created for the occasion. The divorced one and the entire community will hear all of his or her bad deeds being recounted. In one **bitxw** of which I was told, a man was ridiculed for having given away his wife's shawl to his lover (M. Johnson). After the divorce feast, the two formerly married people are not supposed to have harsh words for or about each other again.

Once divorced, a Gitksan person is free to marry whomever he or she and his or her relatives wish. A divorced person is not expected to marry into the same family again as in the case of death of a spouse, although some do.

VIII Inheritance

For the Gitksan, there are two kinds of inheritable property. One is personal property that can be willed to anyone; the other is house property which can only be inherited by a house member. Personal property was very limited in traditional Gitksan society, essentially consisting of a person's tools and non-ceremonial clothing. Today, personal property, which can be inherited by non-house kin such as a man's children, is more extensive, including such things as a house and lot, an automobile, a boat, etcetera. House property which can only be inherited by house members includes such things as territory and fishing sites, hereditary names, crests, chief's robes, and songs.

Both men and women become chiefs, although traditionally women rarely became the highest chief of a house. Women would frequently be wing chiefs, though. Today most house chiefs are still men, but about twenty-five percent of house chiefs have been women in recent years. Because most house chiefs are and were men, I will usually be discussing inheritance from a male house member to another male house member. When the chief is a woman, matrilineal inheritance can be somewhat different, of course, in that her children

can inherit from her, while this is not so for a man.

Both biological right to inherit through the matriline and merit enter into the choice of a chief's heir. When a chief is a man, according to the elders, his most likely heir is his sister's son. This is true today as it was in the past, although it was more common in the past before the lives of potential heirs were upset by extraneous circumstances. I believe it can be safely assumed that the stated ideal of inheritance from a man to his sister's son was the most common inheritance pattern in pre-contact times. North America was relatively disease free at that time, with a high level of health (Wirsing 1985:304; McNeill 1977:177); and Gitksan society had long periods of stability, according to the oral histories (Barbeau 1928:238; n.d.c:57). Under such conditions it could usually be expected that the preferred heir would usually live to inherit.

Before contact it could also be expected that heirs would be socially ready to accept their responsibilities, since great emphasis was put on the proper socialization of potential heirs. Several chiefs, including Stanley Wilson, Ts'iibasaa, of the Fireweed Clan of Kispiox, the late Stanley Williams, Gwisgyen, of the Fireweed Clan of

Kitsegukla, Olive Ryan, Gwaans of the Fireweed Clan of Kitsegukla, and the late Moses Morrison, Gitluudaahlxw, of the Fireweed Clan of Kispiox, described to me explicitly how, in the past, chief's heirs were trained from a very early age to become chiefs, and that they usually eventually took the position they had been trained for. In the pre-contact era there was no alcoholism; no epidemics of smallpox, measles, or tuberculosis; no removal of children to residential schools; no wage labour which resulted in the separation of children and adults; no provincial government regulations prohibiting fishing, hunting, and trapping by certain methods, in certain places, at certain times; no forest companies, railroads, highways, and towns obliterating hunting grounds, fishing sites, and plant-gathering places. All of these things have arisen since contact to interfere in the inheritance of chiefly titles and responsibilities. Some elderly chiefs still living at the time of my research were chosen as chiefs' heirs at birth or during very early childhood. Stanley Wilson (still living), born 1918, and Stanley Williams (recently deceased), born 1907, both told me of being chosen as future chiefs at a very young age. Mary Johnson told me how a chief's heir could even be designated before birth. She told me a story of how the belly of a pregnant woman was painted with red ochre at a feast many

years ago and the unborn child proclaimed a future chief. That child, later named Rhoda Johnson when the white people arrived, became a chief in the house of Geel (1985).

With European contact, the Gitksan encountered a period of unprecedented disruption. Epidemics devastated their population which made it much more difficult to choose heirs at birth. The losses were such that many proclaimed heirs must have died. Barbeau (1928) details one such case. In pre-contact times heirs were chosen at such a young age that they had not demonstrated their worth; but it was probable that chosen heirs, with careful upbringing, would live up to expectations. If for some reason the chosen heir was not deemed to have lived up to his potential, another suitable person who also had chiefly training and who had demonstrated his worth would be chosen. There were always others with chiefly training and potential, because all of the chief's nephews and nieces received chiefly training to take high ranking positions.

Today, chiefs' heirs are not always chosen from birth, although some are. Because of the many disruptions to traditional education in post-contact society, the element of merit has become more important in the selection of chiefs' heirs. The chosen heir, deemed the most worthy,

may not be the one who was initially expected to be the heir. In recent times, a chief usually indicates his choice of a person to succeed him after that person has demonstrated considerable worth. Heirs are not chosen solely on the basis of merit - inherited position is essential - but merit is an important element.

The single most important criterion in heir selection today is still the biological connection between predecessor and heir. The heir must be a house member unless the house is actually or virtually extinct. Adoption of house members will be discussed in its own chapter, but I will mention here that a house with a low population will adopt members so as to avoid extinction. When the epidemics were raging, virtually all houses suffered from low populations and found it hard to acquire adoptees. In some cases, houses had to amalgamate to continue their survival; or, at times, upstanding members of closely related houses in the same clan would be adopted into a house to take the chiefly names to ensure the survival of the house. Ordinarily, population decline in a house is a slow process which can be avoided by increasing the birth rate or by adopting women who bear children who can be raised and trained as house members from birth; but during the time the epidemics were raging, entire houses were wiped out within a

generation, resulting in the need for desperate measures such as amalgamation or the adoption of adults from related houses to become chiefs.

Both today and in the past, a chief's heir is more often his sister's son than any other category of relative. Even if the heir is not the chief's sister's son, he or she is likely to be a member of the chief's lineage. Such a relative may be the chief's brother or sister, his sister's daughter, his sister's daughter's son, his sister's daughter's daughter or some other close matrilineal relative. In the last resort, a house member of a different lineage from the chief may be chosen as heir. This is not a rare situation today.

In the past, chiefs' heirs were clearly recognized. They were publicly proclaimed by being seated in front of the chief at his feet during feasts. In that position they would hear and learn all that the chief learned in these important events. Chiefs' heirs are still indicated by feast seating in the western Gitksan villages, where each heir is seated across the table from the chief from whom he or she will inherit. In the eastern Gitksan villages where feast seating does not indicate inheritance, some chiefs still make their choice of heir publicly known by

announcing it at a feast and presenting the heir, as I saw Stanley Wilson, Ts'iibasaa, do with his heir, David Harris. In other cases, the house members may know who the chief would like to succeed him.

When a chief dies, the successor named by him may not actually be the one who inherits his name. When a chief dies, the wing chiefs of his house, along with others who might include his widow, his adult children, members of his **wilksiwitxw**, and chiefs of closely related houses in his clan, gather to make the final decision concerning who will take his name. The old chief's wish is taken as a serious consideration, but may not be the choice made by the relatives. They may deem it wiser to choose someone else. I have had the privilege to be respected enough to be invited to participate in one such meeting, and the sadness to have loved the elderly chief who passed away. When Alice Wilson, Hawaa'w, of the Wolf Clan of Kispiox, wife of my husband's chief passed away, I was invited with my husband to attend the meeting where it was decided that her son, George, would take her name. I was not in a position to give an opinion at this meeting, not being of high enough rank and close enough relationship to Alice. Both would be essential for input. Even the chief's own nephew or child could not voice an opinion on such a solemn matter

if they did not have a high ranking name.

When the old chief dies and the relatives meet to decide who will "take the name", a young man (in Gitksan terms aged 35 to 45) with potential and from the same lineage as the old chief will usually be chosen over an older, experienced man from a more distantly related lineage of the house. Usually a member of a lineage other than the chiefly one is chosen only if the chiefly one has no appropriate heirs. When there are several lineages to choose from, a lineage which is biologically or emotionally close to the chiefly one will probably provide the heir. At times, the heir will not be someone born in the chiefly lineage but rather someone raised by a woman of that lineage. All lineages of a house have some claim to inheritance of a chief's name; and there may be differences of opinion, but the members of the chiefly lineage have the greatest amount of power to decide who will inherit the chief's name.

Conflict over claims to a chief's name rarely become overt. All possible candidates are members of the same family. They are taught to respect the authority of the chiefs and elders, and that the good of the family and the people is more important than the good of the individual. The surest

route to prestige in Gitksan society is still civility, responsibility, and generosity; and the surest route to ridicule and denigration is selfishness. All properly trained Gitksan know that being a chief is a heavy responsibility with many costs in time, energy, worry, money, and goods; and few material benefits in return. It is not a position resulting in personal advantage for the individual; but rather entails great expense, effort, and appropriate behaviour at all times. As often as not, any disagreement about who should take a chief's name is not between competitors wanting the name, but because a candidate is reluctant to shoulder the responsibility his family has chosen for him. If there is conflict between possible candidates, it is usually resolved quietly within the house by the elders.

As mentioned previously, merit is considered together with biological relationship in the choosing of a chief's heir. In the pre-contact era, merit was an element which probably did not need as much consideration as it does today. Then, an heir was chosen at birth, raised and educated to be a chief; and would likely become chief if he did not die or become disabled. If the chosen heir was unable to take the name, his younger brother or a cousin would have had similar training, and would be able to assume the

responsibility. The meritorious qualities which have always been required for a chief's heir include a personal life that is in good order; sobriety, wisdom, patience, generosity and self-control; the desire and ability to look after his family's economic, social, emotional, and spiritual needs; knowledge of the house territory, all types of cultural knowledge, good judgement, fairness, kindness, and spiritual power. The chief's heir should also be a hard worker and well off, although his wealth does not "buy" a chief's name. Wealth is seen as a sign of hard work and right living which are essential characteristics of a chief. He should know the Gitksan language and laws well, he should be a good orator, and he should have a spouse who supports him in his endeavors. A chief must be able to "hold up the name".

Both the house chief's name and many of the **gaak** (wing) chief's names are held by members of the chiefly lineage. In a large house with more than one lineage, a lineage or "side" of the house, called **sto'o wilp**, may hold some of the high names inter-generationally as those names are passed on to close relatives within the lineage in the same process already described for the house chief's name. This practise both helps to diffuse power in the house, and sets the stage for division of the house along the lines of the

sto'o wilp, which would each then have its own set of chief's names. This pattern will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter X.

When a house chief's title is inherited, the stewardship of all house property is inherited with it. House property cannot be alienated by the chief or anyone else except in the most dire of circumstances as previously elucidated, so with each succeeding name holder comes the responsibility for caring for the house property and the house members. The primary property is the house territory and fishing sites from which house members once made most of their living. These are still important economic properties today. With the inheritance of the chief's name comes the responsibility to care for the crests, **adaa'ox̲**, songs, and other ephemeral property of the house. The chief also inherits the **gwiis halait**, chief's robe, **am halait**, headdress, and other regalia of his predecessor. For house members who are not chiefs, house membership gives inherited right to access to house territories and fishing sites and the right to wear house crests.

IX Adoption

When Gitksan are speaking English, there are two discrete ways they use the word "adoption"; and the differences between the two uses are very significant. One use of the word "adoption" would be to refer to **sihlguxhlxwst**, which means the raising of a child by someone other than the birth parents. The other use made of the word "adoption" by Gitksan would be to refer to **ts'imilguudit**, to make someone a house member. So, if a Gitksan person says, "I adopted Betty's baby", that is very different from saying, "I adopted my son's wife into my house.". The first usage' **sihlguxhlxwst**, is similar to the usual English usage; but the second usage, **ts'imilguudit**, usually has nothing to do with children. A child raised by someone other than its birth parents is usually raised by a house member and does not change house membership, but the adoption of someone into a house always involves a change of house membership. Someone taken into a house may be a non-Gitksan, receiving an official place in the Gitksan social structure for the first time; or they might be Gitksan already but changing house membership.

Both Adams (1973:32) and Kasakoff (1970:30) have some serious misconceptions when they discuss Gitksan

"adoption". They do not seem always to be aware of when references are being made to **sihlguxhlxwst** and when to **ts'imilguudit**. This confusion may have led them to the erroneous assumption that "adoptions" (**ts'imilguudit**) were common and that whole groups of people were adopted into houses (Adams 1973:32). In fact, **sihlguxhlxwst** is quite common; but **ts'imilguudit** is not. Children were, in the past, and continue to be, raised by someone other than their own parents quite often; but in a very large percentage of such instances, one of the adopting parents is in the same house as the child being adopted. Typically, a child raised by other than birth parents would be raised by his mother's mother or mother's sister. This type of "adoption" may be common, but it does not affect house populations.

Sihlguxhlxwst may be the source of the misconception that groups of people were "adopted" into houses. If the mother of several children died, that group of children may be raised by another woman; but that woman would almost always be a member of the same house as the children and their deceased mother. This is the only type of group "adoption" of which I have ever heard. When people are adopted into a house (**ts'imilguudit**), it is always singly, with the exception of the adoption of a woman with a small child.

My research does not indicate a single case of group **ts'imilguudit** other than a young mother with her baby. In the case of a Gitksan woman being adopted from the house in which she was born into another house, it may even be decided by the two houses involved that her future children remain with her original house.

Ts'imilguudit is probably the most effective tool for maintaining house stability when biological means fail. This obervation is not meant to play down the importance of the biological definition of a house, but to emphasize that those house members who do not fall into the biological definition are perfectly legitimate house members. A house is both a biological and a social unit. **Ts'imilguudit** is done with great consideration, and is not common.

The Gitksan seem to have two main purposes for undertaking **ts'imilguudit**. The most common reasons are for "strategic" purposes - to bolster the population of a house with declining numbers. Of less significance but probably more common are adoptions designed to accommodate the needs of the individual adoptee. These are adoptions of non-Gitksan who have special relationships with the Gitksan but who cannot participate fully in Gitksan society without becoming house members. Such individuals are usually the

spouses of Gitksan. A spouse of a Gitksan is almost always adopted by his or her father-in-law, which is consistent with the preference for marriage into one's father's house. Such an adoption essentially creates a cross-cousin marriage after the fact. This kind of adoption usually occurs with houses with healthy populations, and the adoptees do not attain high rank, so the effect on house population and composition is usually small. Occasionally, an unrelated but very good friend of a house may be adopted. Occasionally an adoption may fulfil both functions of providing house members to a house needing people, and providing a place for an individual in need of a place in Gitksan society.

A third type of **ts'imilguudit**, which occurs rarely, is the honourary type in which an individual, usually a dignitary, is given a name but is not expected to hold up the responsibilities that go with it. This is not a "serious" adoption, and the name given in such a manner is usually taken back after a time and conferred on a house member. Most Gitksan have taken names and house membership far too seriously to be involved in this type of adoption in recent years. In the past, this type of adoption was used to honour important people of neighbouring nations; and was a powerful tool for maintaining friendly relations. This

once honourable practise has taken on some measure of disapproval because the conferees in recent honourary adoptions, not having similar institutions, have not been aware of the seriousness of the gesture.

As was previously mentioned, the most significant type of **ts'imilguudit** is that undertaken to increase the population of a house with dangerously declining numbers. Each house needed a certain number of people to fulfil its economic and social requirements. Houses were economic units; and, as in any hunting and gathering group, a minimum number of men and women were required to fulfil economic roles; possibly, at least twenty. Probably an even larger number were required to fulfil the social roles.

Houses see people as their most important resource. The house is perpetual, but it is a kinship unit and it does need living people to exist. Each house had a set of names which would be remembered as long as there were people to take those names. The house had territories and fishing sites with economic and historical knowledge attached which must have people to be remembered. The house had **adaa'ox̲** and songs which needed people to remember them. Each house politely vied for prestige, which was impossible without people to create the wealth distributed at the feast. The

greatest shame of a Gitksan house was to be so impoverished in people, and thereby wealth, so as to not be able to bury one's own dead properly. What is meant by this expression is that the house has insufficient wealth to put up a proper feast. This is such a serious matter that the house which takes on this responsibility for a poor house may be given extremely valuable property such as land, a fishing site, or a crest. It is hard to describe how significant this event is. Such property is eternal, and its loss threatens the very survival of future generations; so it is only given in the most grave of circumstance.

When a house is low in population, it usually adopts someone from a closely related house in the same clan, the **wilnadaahl**. Such adoptees will already have some of the knowledge needed to be a member of the house into which they are being adopted. They will likely share at lest some common history (**adaa'oɣ**), and possibly a considerable amount. They will have worked together at feasts, and may know the names and the people well in their new house. There may even be seen to be some biological continuity, especially if the receiving and giving houses are very closely related, as in the case in which one is a subdivision of the other. When a house undertakes such an adoption, it usually chooses to adopt young women of child-

bearing age or young men of strength and character who can lead the next generation.

In the past, adoptions were probably not as common as they have become in recent decades since the serious social and biological disruption of contact. The **adaa'ox** indicate that Gitksan houses were very stable in the pre-contact era. One of the most basic reasons for population stability in this period was environmental. As has been well known for many years (Benedict 1934:173; Drucker 1963:3; LaViolette 1973:3), the West Coast peoples have enjoyed one of the most bountiful environments anywhere. In some ways the Gitksan may have even greater access to resources than other West Coast peoples because their territory falls within three major ecological zones - coastal, interior, and sub-arctic - each providing resources not available in the other zones. In any event, the resources found in Gitksan territory were not only bountiful, they were predictable; and the Gitksan had the food gathering and preservation technologies to utilize these resources. Deprivation was so rare that it when it did occur, it was immortalized across the millennia in the **adaa'ox**.

Pre-contact Gitksan house populations were also able to

remain relatively stable because of the lack of epidemic diseases of that time and the high level of health, as I previously mentioned. This state is confirmed by the elders who describe the superb health, vitality, and extreme longevity of their recent predecessors. When a bountiful environment and high level of health are taken together, it can be reasonably inferred that pre-contact population was stable, barring exceptional circumstances such as war or natural disaster.

In the event of a raid or natural disaster wiping out most of the members of a house living in a village, avunculocal residence may have functioned as a kind of insurance for house survival. If such a disaster occurred, there would be surviving women and children of the house residing in other villages with their husbands and fathers.

If a house was suffering from population decline in pre-contact times, they had other means at their disposal for increasing house population in addition to **ts'imilguudit**. The elders say that the ideal family size was considered two to four children before contact, and that these children would often be spaced over twenty years or more. A healthy population with bountiful resources could increase such a birth rate considerably if it chose to do

so. Families of two to four may have been ideal to maintain a stable population, but houses with declining numbers could easily have raised birth rates to maintain a stable house size by natural increase. In fact, some women were "assigned" the duty to have a larger number of children than usual with the support of other house members (Ryan 1985). Increasing the birth rate could easily have been accomplished by foregoing the usual practise of long periods of sexual abstinence, which were undertaken to gain power; or by shortening the duration of nursing and sexual abstinence after childbirth, which may have been as long as four years.

We have seen evidence in post-contact times to confirm this potential for rapid population increase. Since the practise of forms of sexual abstinence and other traditional forms of birth control declined, the birth rate increased tremendously, especially between 1920 and the 1960s. Many Gitksan houses have managed to survive the high death rates attributable mainly to introduced diseases by natural increase. Some houses have not undertaken any adoptions (**ts'imilguudit**) of which I am aware.

X Amalgamation and Division of Houses

Throughout Gitksan history, houses have divided and merged. Three main reasons are given for divisions. One is because their population rose to the point where there were not enough resources from the house territory and fishing sites to support that number of people, and because there were not enough hereditary names for the number of people. A second reason commonly given for the division of a house is that it became so wealthy that it could support two houses and more people. And a third reason is that there was a quarrel within the house. Houses have merged, according to the **adaa'ox**, because of migrations and low house populations. It is these processes which result in the relationships between or relatedness of houses within a **wilnadaahl**. Elders can often be heard to say, "Our house came out of theirs," or "Our chiefs were brothers a long time ago." The **adaa'ox** relate in detail the reasons, names, and places involved in the division of houses.

The division and amalgamation of houses was probably rare in pre-contact times. Such drastic measures would never have been undertaken lightly, because family solidarity is considered one of the highest values. As well, throughout long periods of Gitksan history, stability generally

reigned. There were definite periods of instability, during which many divisions and amalgamations occurred. Such periods would include the very early period of the orally recorded history of the ancestral Gitksan, which was a formative period during which groups of kin were moving throughout the northwest as the ice of the Wisconsin glaciation receded. Another such period of kin group reformation was when the people were forced to leave T'xemlax'amid, probably due to a downturn in the climate possibly at the end of the Hypsithermal, about 4,000 B.P. Generally though, stability has been the norm in Gitksan history; and even through periods of great change such as those just named, continuity of kinship units was held at such a high value that it is still possible for many houses to trace their origin back to the end of the Pleistocene (Harris 1994b). Many families can trace their history through a series of stories relating the places they have lived and major events in which they were involved back to a time when the stories are describing obviously early Holocene-late Pleistocene environments. Such stories describe a recently deglaciated treeless land, marine intrusions far inland from current coastlines, a glacial lake in the valley of the Skeena and the "flood" which is probably a result of a number of factors in a deglaciating environment (Harris 1994b).

During the earliest period of known Gitksan ancestral history, divisions of kin groups were probably more common than amalgamations. During this time of the late Pleistocene-early Holocene peopling of the northwest, populations were probably rising; and new land and its resources were opening up, making it possible for new groups to form to take up this new land. But very early on, the oral histories record conflicts created when a group of people tried to amalgamate with their clan kin already settled in a location. These stories almost always refer to a shortage of resources as the reason. The very early post-glacial environment possibly would not have been as prolific as the one which has existed for the last several millennia, and the technology to utilize available resources was probably not as sophisticated as in recent millennia. Certainly by the time of the major population dislocation which may have occured at the end of the Hypsithermal, it was difficult for groups to divide, form new groups, and take up empty land. Stories of this period describe how difficult it was to find a place for migrating kin groups to settle.

Throughout the rest of Gitksan history, during the periods of relative stability, amalgamations and divisions of houses did sometimes occur. Such drastic measures were

only undertaken to avoid crisis situations, such as when the impending extinction of a house, after an attack which wiped out a large number of house members, required the remnant of a house to amalgamate with a related house to survive. A division of a house might occur when an accelerating quarrel among brothers led to, or threatened to lead to, bloodshed.

After a house divides, the members of the newly created unit or units do not soon forget they were once one house. The newer house or houses often show allegiance to the parent house. One example of this situation is Xhliiyemlaxha of the Wolf Clan of Kispiox. The family of 'Wii Muug'ulsxw split off from Xhliiyemlaxha because they were wealthy and numerous. 'Wii Muug'ulsxw's house acts independently from Xhliiyemlaxha's house at times, while at other times they concede to Xhliiyemlaxha as their highest authority. This relationship seems to be maintained especially if the two subdivisions reside in the same village. The relationship of deference may decline with time and distance, but the knowledge of the relationship is maintained for millennia.

As I have elucidated above, efforts were made to keep house populations at optimal levels; and to maintain the

integrity of every house. In spite of these efforts, catastrophic events, such as wars or natural disasters, occasionally left house populations so devastated that amalgamation with a related house was the logical strategy for the survival of the house, its history, names, songs, crests and other property, and for the remaining people in it. Such amalgamations may have been effected with the plan in mind of eventually reconstituting the absorbed house. The **adaa'ox** record instances in which a house amalgamated with a related house and then came out of it again, reclaiming its independent existence.

Throughout Gitksan history, amalgamations of houses have occurred, although they are not common. Amalgamation is a desperate measure to maintain the survival of house property and living house members when all other measures such as adoption and natural increase fail. Because amalgamations are desperate measures undertaken in time of crisis and population decline, it is not surprising that they have accelerated since contact, a period of unprecedented crisis and population decline. The crisis of the introduced epidemics and other disruptions has greatly affected every Gitksan house and village. In the 1920s Barbeau (1929) recorded amalgamations which had occurred in the decades preceding his research; and during the

genealogical research, I recorded amalgamations which had occurred since.

Amalgamations of houses may even have occurred during the time of my research, but it is not always clear whether an amalgamation has occurred. The reason it is not always clear is that it may be a process rather than an event. If a clear decision was made to amalgamate two houses, and a feast was given and an announcement made in the feast hall, the amalgamation would be an event; but in other cases it is not so clear. In one case I witnessed in which amalgamation seems to have occurred, there was only one surviving original member of a Frog Clan house. When he died, his chief's name was taken by a member of a related house which had previously taken some of the names of the now-extinct house. The holders of the names of the extinct house seem to be acting as if they are part of their original, larger house; the extinct house seems to have been absorbed, although I have not heard people say it outright. In the other case which I witnessed, an elderly Fireweed Clan man had been the last surviving member of his house for decades. During this period he had adopted several people into his house, mainly from two other Fireweed houses. When he died there were possibly twenty adoptees and their children in his house. Those people

seemed to be strong enough to carry on and build up the house. One of the adoptees was seen by many community members to be the logical one to take the house chief's name when the old man died. The old man himself had vacillated between the adopted man and the chief of another Fireweed house as being his heir. It was from that chief's house that a slight majority of the adopted house members had been drawn, which put him a powerful position. When the elderly chief died, the chief of the other Fireweed house took his name without relinquishing the highest name in his original house. How that decision was made, I am not privileged to know. So the question now remains, has the house extinct of original members maintained a separate existance, or has it been absorbed by the other house? The answer may be worked out over time.

In the past, there was probably less confusion concerning whether or not two houses had amalgamated. When the Gitksan lived in the large cedar plank dwellings owned by the houses, it would have been obvious when an amalgamation of houses took place, when the remnants of the declining group actually moved into the dwelling of the other house. Then, as now, it was remembered which names, songs, crests, land, and other property belonged to each house; so that the future reconstitution of the two houses was

possible. When houses divide, it is not as equivocal as when they merge, because such a change must be announced and witnessed in the feast.

As part of the process of amalgamation of houses to ensure the survival of houses suffering from the devastating effects of contact, there was also a shift in house location. During the 1920s, the last of the people of Kaldo'o moved to Kispiox and Gitanmaax; and in the 1940s, with some pressure from the Department of Indian Affairs, Kisga'ga'as was abandoned as a year-round habitation. The houses which were once located in these two northern villages are now found in Kispiox and Gitanmaax, but they do not forget where they came from. In recent years there has been some movement back, especially to Kisga'ga'as, with more people building cabins and spending more time there.

In some cases, in the early contact period, houses divided and the newly formed houses moved to Gitanmaax or Kispiox, possibly to be closer to the new centre of commercial activity; but with the precipitous population decline that many houses faced during this period, they were often forced to reamalgamate with their house of origin. Two cases of this process which have been documented by Barbeau

(1929) are that of Axtiskan coming out of Gutgwinuxs, and Yal coming our of Antgwulilibiksxw. Barbeau (1929:86) mentions the movement of Axtiskan out of the house of Woosimlaxha and Gutgwinuxs of Kispiox to Hazelton in 1871. Descendants of Axtiskan are today usually referred to as members of the House of Gutgwinuxs.

The division of Antgwulilibiksxw and Yal is also mentioned by Barbeau (1929:92). In this case, according to the current Antgwulilibiksxw, a woman, Axtiwilgaa'wsxw, a member of the house of Antgwulilibiksxw in Kispiox, married Gyed'mgaldo'o, a Frog Clan chief of Gitanmaax, and moved to his village. This event occurred around 1870. Axtiwilgaa'wsxw and her children set up their own house in Gitanmaax, and took Yal as the highest name and therefore name of the house. But this new house of Yal was fated to become extinct in a generation, because Axtiwilgaa'wsxw had seven sons and only one daughter, who was childless. By the time the last of Axtiwilgaa'wsxw's sons died in 1950, he was usually referred to as a member of the house of Antgwulilibiksxw.

Many house populations have risen greatly in the last six or seven decades. The birth rate of the Gitksan from the 1920s to the 1960s may have been higher than at any time in

their history. The birth rate has now dropped considerably, but is still high enough that the population is expanding at a fairly rapid rate. Some houses have become very large, numbering over 300 people. This probably would have been an unmanageable number in the pre-contact era: three hundred was far more than could live in the house dwelling, and probably more than could be distributed among in-laws. It was probably more than there was resources to provide for, and more than there were hereditary names to go around. Having a name was important to house members; and if there were not enough names to go around, there would have been strife. I once asked an elderly chief, "What did they call people without names in the old days?", trying to elicit an answer regarding how a shortage of hereditary names would be dealt with. She answered, "**Wa'aiyin** or **maamst**." which means "lazy" or "a bit crazy". Her answer may not have been what I was after, but it emphasized the point that every responsible person expected to have a name.

Although 300 may have been an unmanageable number of house members in pre-contact times, when they had to be supported from the resources of their territory, housed and named by their house, today it is possible for house populations to expand beyond those limits because of the alternative

economy and social structure. Even with those alternatives available which can ensure the survival of members of an overly large house, there is still stress because of competition for resources, names, and prestige. Such stress can move a house towards the possibility of division. Other factors may be just as, or even more, important, such as a quarrel or competition within the house. In one Kispiox house which seems to be on the verge of dividing, reconstituting actually, it is not numbers so much as other factors which seem to be providing the impetus.

Another factor which may be involved in making such major changes difficult is the changed Gitksan economy and economic relations. At one time the chiefs could draw on the wealth of the land, restrained only by ecological/spiritual and social restraints. In other words, they could take resources from the land as long as the land could support it, the land ethic could support it, and the house members would support the chief by providing the labour. Today, house members certainly do still support chiefly undertakings; the prestige of the chief is the prestige of the house members and vice versa. But the Gitksan today are impoverished by traditional standards, due to the usurpation of their land and diminishment of

their traditional economy. Economic relations have changed so that the Gitksan live by wage labour, small business, government transfer payments, or commonly, a combination. Many Gitksan are not well off by Canadian standards, and do not have as much surplus as they or their chiefs would wish to contribute to house business. It is amazing to see how much the members of a **wilnadaahl** manage to contribute when a feast arises, ($20,000 or $30,000 is not at all unusual), but it is not what it once was by Gitksan standards. The amount of resources needed to validate such an important change as the constitution of a new house are hard to come by today. A chief, through individual effort, must contribute a much larger share of the required wealth than was once necessary.

XI Conclusion

Today, in 1994, the traditional kinship system and many other aspects of the social structure of the Gitksan are alive and functioning. The Gitksan have maintained these traditions, possibly more than any other peoples of the northwest. That fact is recognized by surrounding peoples. I have heard Ts'imsian, Nisga'a, Haida, Haisla, and Wet'suwet'en express the belief that the Gitksan have maintained their traditions to a greater degree than they have. I would say that an important factor contributing to this continuity is the fact that Europeans found Gitksan territory difficult to penetrate and consequently arrived there very late, not settling in the territory until the 1880s. This relative isolation may also have resulted in less devastation of the Gitksan population by the introduced epidemics, and the consequent disruption to the social structure that comes with such population losses. I do not want to downplay the effects of the epidemics; the Gitksan suffered very serious losses of population, but those losses were probably somewhat less than those suffered by some of their neighbours.

In spite of enormous pressure, both intended and unintended, put on these systems, they have been maintained

and are even enjoying renewed life as young people are becoming more interested in learning these traditions. The inroads of enforced culture change that were made by government administrators, educators, missionaries, and social workers until the 1960s are well on their way to being reversed. This change may be partly attributable to the changing social and political climate in Canadian society, but I believe most of the credit must go to the Gitksan. Many Gitksan, old and young alike, tenaciously held onto the traditional systems in spite of enormous acculturative pressures. These people have since begun to reassert their cultural priorities with considerable success. Today, as the Gitksan are regaining control of many aspects of their lives, they do not have to invent new institutions because the house and clan system and the authority of the chiefs is still in place and able to retake control.

For the Gitksan, one aspect of retaking control in their lives is having a say in the kinds of research undertaken in their territory. Some research done in earlier years, particularly in the 1970s, makes Gitksan who have read the results very angry. Gitksan sometimes find such work, which is so grossly inaccurate, laughable; but the laughing turns to anger when those inaccuracies are used against the

people as they were in the Delgamuukw land claim case. Michael Asch (1980:50) warns against the possiblity that poorly thought out research can "come back to haunt us". He states in a paper concerned with the Dene that assertations based upon "flimsy evidence" can be "used in the law courts to disenfranchise" the people (1980:50). I hope that my research was thorough enough to avoid this possibility.

When I testified in the Delgamuukw case, I was essentially asked by Michael Goldie, lead lawyer for the province, how I dared to assert conflicting conclusions to those of John Adams, a Harvard professor. I certainly do not have Adams' academic credentials; but I have no trouble contradicting him because my work has two advantages over his, rapport and thoroughness.

As reviewed in this thesis, the greatest difficulty with the work of Adams and others like him who have spent only short periods of time among the Gitksan, is methodological; and the most serious methodological problem in their work is not having spent the time it takes to get things right. I realize that I was in a privileged position, having lived in the community for two years before beginning the research, having become a community member with kinship

ties to local people, and having been afforded the opportunity to undertake three years of research on my topic. These are opportunities which contemporary anthropological researchers rarely have. It is possible, though, for researchers to have enough respect and commitment, both to the people they study and to their discipline, to make the effort necessary to get correct information.

I have seen anthropologists like Mark Duiven and Richard Daly make commitments to the community. Both of these men came to study the Gitksan and stayed in their territory. I have seen other anthropologists like Hugh Brody, who did not stay for lengthy periods, but who showed great respect to the people and showed commitment to the community by returning several times. Anthropologists like the three just mentioned have received very good quality information from the people in return for their respect and commitment. I have heard Gitksan remark with disgust and derision how other anthropologists, with superior attitudes, have breezed into the territory, expecting the people freely to give them all their treasures; and have been lied to as a joke.

Gitksan political leaders, elders, and community members

have become sophisticated in recent years regarding the motives and methods of researchers. They now demand that the work have relevance to the Gitksan, and that it be thoroughly and properly done. In recent years, researchers have been either refused permission to work in the community, or have been asked to change their focus so that it has relevance for the community as well as the researcher. The Gitksan feel there is much work that needs to be done in the community, and that if the expertise of researchers can help to accomplish those goals while meeting the career and educational goals of the researcher, then it should do both. The Gitksan know that researchers benefit greatly from the work they do in the community, and that they should return something useful to the community.

The Gitksan are also concerned that researchers do accurate work, because misunderstandings die hard. I have already mentioned how such mistakes have come back at the people. What I am referring to here is the notion promulgated by John Adams and John Cove that the houses are not kin groups but are corporate units created for the express purpose of exploiting resources. One of the major tenets of the province and the federal government in the Delgamuukw case was that the court case had been undertaken solely for the economic gain of individuals who operated completely under

a capitalist economic maximization motive. The notion of the houses as profit-maximizing economic units, promulgated by Adams and Cove, fuelled that spurious argument.

Other anthropologically created myths have affected the Gitksan in real terms. Early anthropologists who worked among the Gitksan and other Ts'imsian-speakers, such as Marius Barbeau and Viola Garfield, seemed to have no difficulty accepting the fact that the oral histories were, to at least a considerable degree, historical; but Barbeau, especially, writing at a time when many anthropologists did not realize the time depth of native American cultures, believed that the oral historical record of the Gitksan and other Ts'imsian-speakers covered a period of only a few hundred years. Barbeau said, "With the exception of a few myths mostly on the beginnings, the majority of the narratives relate episodes belonging to the last two or three centuries" (n.d.b:1). He went so far as to say, "All these northern and coastal tribes of paleo-siberians must have landed severally into Alaska during the past few centuries, that is, since the great Siberian upheaval dating back to Genghis Khan, in the thirteenth century" (Barbeau n.d.b:1, 37-8). At great length Barbeau explains why a very ancient Wolf Clan story of travelling under a glacier over the Stikine River occurred only "two to four

hundred years ago" (n.d.d:8). He also says that stories which related sea-otter hunting are very recent because, "Intensive sea-otter hunting developed only after the Russians and other sea traders began to press the natives....less than two hundred years ago" (Barbeau n.d.d:11). Barbeau claims that the Eagle Clan was such a late arrival in the northwest that the newly arrived group acquired their eagle crest from the Russians (n.d.b:64). He even claims "the clan and crest system of the coast nations was introduced from outside, with the help of painted and carved crests in the manner of the Russian imperial emblem" (Barbeau n.d.b:65). There are many more examples in his work indicating the then current belief in the very recent arrival of the Gitksan and other northwest peoples in North America.

This view of "the coming of man on to our continent during the past millennia" (Barbeau n.d.b:1) contributes to the conception that the aboriginal peoples of the continent are just one immigrant people among many who only arrived slightly sooner than Europeans and therefore have little more claim to the land. Forty years ago, Garfield and Wingert gave the Ts'imsian-speakers "several hundred years" (1951:7) in their current territories. Archaeologists working on the northwest coast have confirmed at least

5,000 years of habitation in the area. The earliest archaeological date from Gitksan territory is around 5,000 B.P. at Hagwilget (Ames 1979). At this time, the strongest evidence of the very early post-glacial arrival of the Gitksan in their territory is the oral histories and early radiocarbon dates found at sites in the territories of surrounding peoples such as Groundhog Bay in Tlingit territory dated at 10,180 B.P. (Ackerman 1968) and Namu in southern Ts'imsian territory dated at 9,140 B.P. (Carlson 1978).

Another inaccurate anthropological construct which had been applied to the Gitksan concerns the argument about whether west coast societies are societies with systems of class or rank. As was mentioned in the chapter on rank in this paper, Garfield and Wingert (1951) said the Ts'imsian had a system of class, and others like Adams (1973:37-8) followed. This came back to haunt the Gitksan in the Delgamuukw case when the province claimed that the dictatorial, undemocratic Gitksan government of chiefs and houses was unconstitutional.

In the 1960s and '70s, possibly beginning with Levi-Strauss' analysis of the Asdiwal story (1967), the **adaa'o<u>x</u>** came to be virtually disregarded as history by

anthropologists. Symbolic analyses of "texts" became popular, such as **A Tsimshian Oedipus** (Ackerman 1975) and **The Shining Youth in Tsimshian Mythology** (Campbell 1975). This approach has been among the more frustrating consequences of anthropological investigation of their cultural property for the Gitksan, since the **adaa'ox̲** are so profoundly important to them. These authors ignored virtually all possibility of the **adaa'ox̲** being history. This situation too came back at the Gitksan in the Delgamuukw case when Justice McEachern (1991:59) said, "many adaawk are of dubious value" in providing precontact historical evidence.

One of the most obvious and long-lived offenses perpetrated upon the Gitksan and their neighbours by anthropologists and others is the publishing of their **adaa'ox̲**. The **adaa'ox̲** are the sacred and private property of the houses which were involved in the events described in them. The purpose of protecting them stringently is to safeguard their accuracy. The entire foundation of Gitksan society is based on the ability of a house to prove its historical ownership of its territory and other properties which provide its identity and validity. The **adaa'ox̲** are far too precious a resource to be trifled with by those with little understanding of them, but anthropologists have done

precisely that from the early years of Boas (1902, 1916) until recently (Cove and McDonald 1987).

Misconceptions written and published about a culture die hard. Research with methodological problems, or which lacks insight, can remain a part of the accepted academic "wisdom" for many years. The topics about which anthropologists write are often very important parts of real people's lives. To the people, these topics are not academic but can cause them harm. Even researchers with the best intentions can inflict harm upon the people they study through inaccurate work. Researchers have a serious responsibility to see that this harm does not occur by taking the time to get things right; and by approaching the people with respect and humility, building the necessary rapport to obtain good information.

Even researchers who meet the people with respect, and who work hard to shed their preconceptions and their own confining cultural constructs, can encounter concepts which are very difficult to understand and very difficult for the people to explain. **Wilnadaahl** seems to one such concept. It took me several years and a wide knowledge base to learn its meaning. Cultures are integrated wholes, while increasingly, anthropologists tend to study them as

dissected parts. A researcher who is too narrow in focus can miss important points even within his area of specialization. Meanings of indigenous concepts can also be distorted beyond recognition to members of a society by attempts to force these concepts into anthropological categories. In such cases it may be better to explain the concept while leaving it untranslated, or to invent a new English terminology for it.

The business of anthropology may be cross-cultural comparison, but members of a society are offended when anthropologists generalize to the point where validity is negated. This situation, of course, is not good practise from the perspective of the discipline either. One area in which inaccuracies have commonly been promulgated about the Gitksan through generalization is when they are lumped together with the Ts'imsian and Nisga'a as "Tsimshian". There are very many similarities between the three peoples, but there are important differences at times as well. Probably the greatest difference is in social stratification, as I discussed in Chapter V.

In my opinion, the most important point proven unequivocally by my genealogical research is that Gitksan houses are matrilineal kin groups. The houses are a

fundamental organizing factor of Gitksan life and society past, present, and future. Houses are as viable today as in the past, serving many of the economic, social, and emotional needs of the people. They show no indications of declining in importance in the future, and every indication of fulfilling the expectation the Gitksan have that houses are eternal.

Footnotes

1. Much of what I know about Gitksan oral history, particularly in regard to chronology, I owe to Susan Marsden's work, **An Historical and Cultural Overview of the Gitksan**. This work involved the enormous task of building chronologies and time lines through a thorough examination of many hundreds of oral histories of the peoples of the northwest.

2. The current villages of Kispiox, Kitsegukla, and Kitwancool all originated at the time of a catastrophic event which may have been precipitated by a decided downturn in the climate 4,000 years ago.

3. The work I am currently undertaking on Gitksan oral history strongly indicates that the earliest known stories take place in a late Pleistocene-early Holocene environment of glaciers in the river valleys, glacial lakes, marine incursions, and post-glacial barrenlands.

Appendix 1
Informant List

The following persons were interviewed by me for the purpose of providing genealogical information on the Gitksan:

Beverley Anderson
Roberta Alexander
Jim Angus Jr.
Mary Angus
Margaret Austin
Norma Barnes
Richard Benson
Sarah Benson
Thelma Blackstock
Bill Blackwater Sr.
David Blackwater
Thelma Blackwater
Walter Blackwater
Mary Bright
Abel Brown
Martha Brown
Violet Brown
Elizabeth Burke
Herb Burke
Joshua Campbell
Racey Casimel
Charlie Clifford
Irene Cournoyer
Cora Crosby
Lillouette Daniels
Elmer Derrick
Lottie Douse
Carol Eichstaedt
Selina Fowler
Annie Gawa
Donna Gawa
Edith Gawa
Sandra Gawa
Wilfred Gawa
Murphy George
Rita George
Alice Good
Cora Gray
David Green
Helen Green
Sylvester Green
Veronica Green

Allita Gunanoot
David Gunanoot
Jerry Gunanoot
David Harris
Emma Harris
Gerry Harris
Jeff Harris Jr.
Jeff Harris Sr.
Ken Harris
Roy Harris
Walter Harris
John and Helen Heit
Emma Hilbach
Martha Hilbach
Sarah Hindle
Kathy Holland
Freddy Howard
Sadie Howard
Alvin Hyzims
Calvin Hyzims
Ernest Hyzims
Solomon Jack
Aubrey Jackson
Lily Jackson
Robert Jackson
Vince Jackson
Alice Jeffrey
Allen Johnson
Clarence Johnson
Dora Johnson
Dorothy Johnson
Ellen Johnson
Emma Johnson
Evelyn Johnson
Fred Johnson
Janet Johnson
Lana Johnson
Mary Johnson
Wallace Johnson
Wilmer Johnson
Barbara Joseph
Helen Josep
Lucille Joseph
Martha Joseph
Alice Kruta Jr.
Art Kusick
Laurel Lattie
Mercy Loring
Katie Ludwig

Charlotte MacCarthy
Kathleen Marsden
Solomon Marsden
Sarah Marshall
Kathleen Matthews
Linda Matthews
Patricia May
Lavender McDonald
Ben McKenzie
Mary McKenzie
Esther McLean
Ralph Michell
David Milton
Emsley Morgan
Geoffrey Morgan
Johnny Moore
Mary Moore
Roy Morris
Billy Morrison
Elsie Morrison
Frances Morrison
Gertie Morrison
James Morrison
Lloyd Morrison
Matilda Morrison
Moses Morrison
Rita Morrison
Sam Morrison
Willie Morrison
Ella Mowatt
Mary Mowatt
Sadie Mowatt
Sophia Mowatt
Victor Mowatt
Earl Muldoe
Lottie Muldoe
Ken Muldoe
Pete Muldoe
Olive Mulwain
Fedilia O'Brien
Emma Pierre
Rosie Pierre
Martha Risdale
Lottie Robinson
Steve Robinson
Rudy Rowland
Don Ryan
Abel Sampson
Alice Sampson

Perry Sampson
Gordon Sebastian
Edith Shanoss
Lorna Simms
Valerie Simms
Chris Skulsh
Fanny Smith
Mary Smith
Percilla Smith
Vernon Smith
Violet Smith
Bertha Starr
Roseline Starr
Jessie Sterritt
Neil B. Sterritt
Neil J. Sterritt
Robert Stevens
Brenda Stewart
Charlotte Sullivan
Nancy Supernault
Albert Tait
Doug Tait
June Tait
Pearl Trombley
Peter Turley
Magnus Turner
Phillip Turner
Riley Turner
Peggy Underhill
Gertie Watson
Alvin Weget
Dorothy Weget
Harvey Wesley
Herbert Wesley
Francis West
Lily White
Mabel White
Buddy Williams
David Williams
Dora Williams
Fanny Williams
Grace Williams
Jackie Williams
Muriel Williams
Rita Williams
Sandra Williams
Stanley Williams
Vicky Williams
Albert Wilson

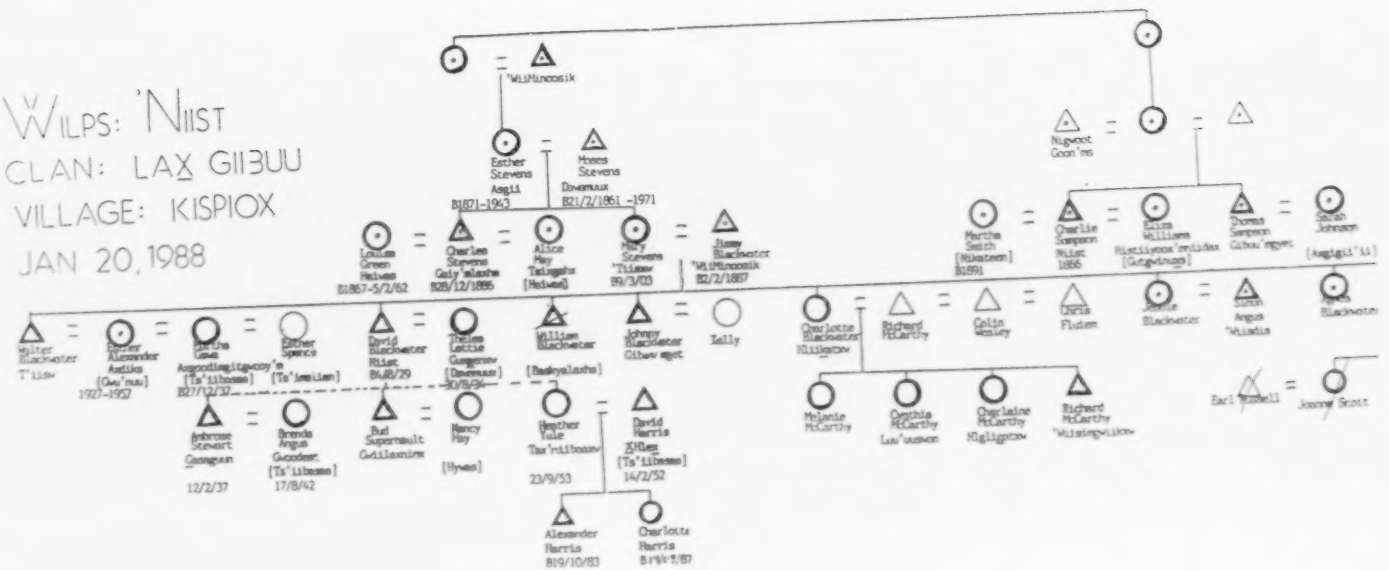
Alice Wilson
Ardythe Wilson
Art Wilson
Dora Wilson-Kenni
Effie Wilson
Gladys Wilson
Henry Wilson
Johnny Wilson
Marie Wilson
Paul Wilson
Roy Wilson Sr.
Stanley Wilson
Walter Wilson
Ellen Woods
Irene Woods
James Woods
Darlene Wright
Joe Wright
Larry Wright
Marjorie Wright
Phyllis Wright
Thomas Wright

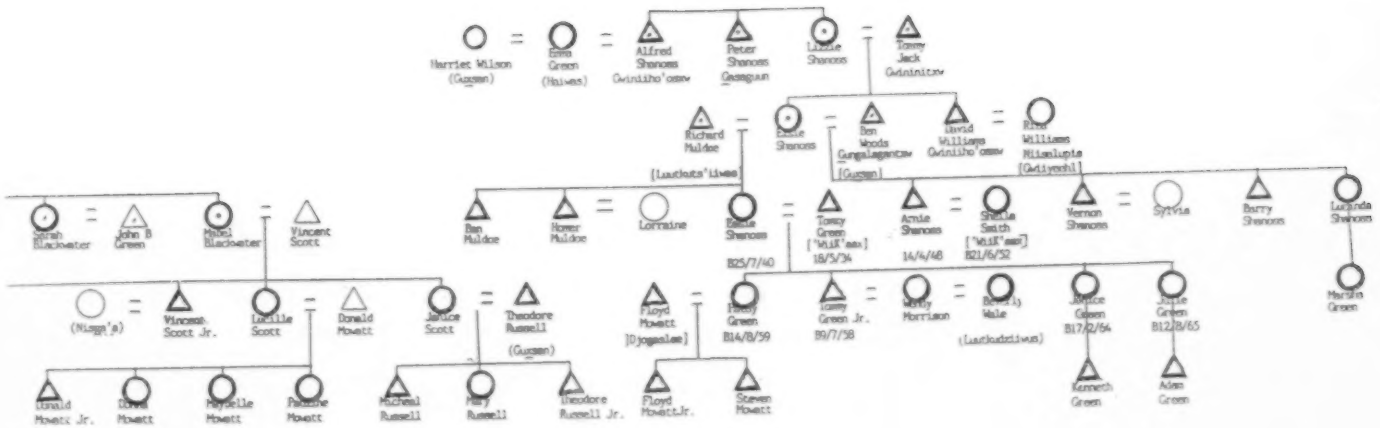
The following persons, interviewed by Neil Sterritt, Susan Marsden, Don Ryan and others, provided information which contributed to my genealogical research on the Gitksan:

Joe Bob
William Charlie
Madeline French
Martha Haimadim
Alex Jack
Mary Jack
Annie Louie
Edith McDougall
Maggie Smart
Ellen Spence
Kathleen Wale

Appendix 2
Sample Genealogy

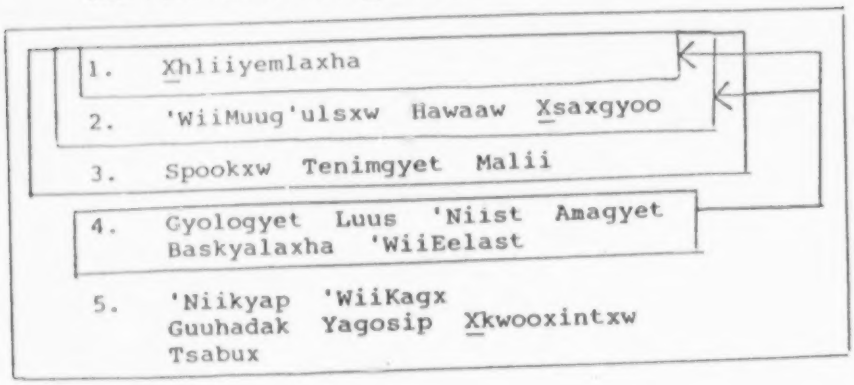
WILPS: 'NIIST
CLAN: LAX GIIBUU
VILLAGE: KISPIOX
JAN 20, 1988




Harriet Wilson
(Gussan)
Emma
Green
(Haiwas)
Alfred
Shanoss
Gwinitho'osaw
Peter
Shanoss
Gasagyan
Lizzie
Shanoss
Tommy
Jack
Gwinitsaw
Richard
Muldoe
[Lastoats'iiwas]
Essie
Shanoss
Ben
Woods
Gungalagansaw
[Gussan]
David
Williams
Gwinitho'osaw
Rhea
Williams
Wilaelupts
[Gwiiyeehl]
Sarah
Blackwater
John B
Green
Mabel
Blackwater
Vincent
Scott
Ben
Muldoe
Homer
Muldoe
Lorraine
Eddie
Shanoss
B25/7/40
Tommy
Green
['Wiil'aas]
18/5/34
Annie
Shanoss
14/4/48
Sheila
Smith
['Wiil'aas]
B21/6/52
Vernon
Shanoss
Sylvia
Barry
Shanoss
Lucinda
Shanoss
Martha
Green
(Nisga'a)
Vincent
Scott Jr.
Lucille
Scott
Donald
Mowatt
Janice
Scott
Theodore
Russell
(Gussan)
Floyd
Mowatt
[Djogaalee]
Penny
Green
B14/8/59
Tommy
Green Jr.
19/7/58
Wendy
Morrison
Ronald
Vale
(Lastoadziiwas)
Janice
Green
B17/2/64
Julie
Green
B12/8/65
Kenneth
Green
Adam
Green
Ronald
Mowatt Jr.
Donna
Mowatt
Maydelle
Mowatt
Pauline
Mowatt
Mitchell
Russell
Mary
Russell
Theodore
Russell Jr.
Floyd
MowattJr.
Steven
Mowatt

Appendix 3
Wilnadaahl Explanation

The Wilnadaahl of Xhliiyemlaxha could include:


1. Xhliiyemlaxha
2. 'WiiMuug'ulsxw Hawaaw Xsaxgyoo
3. Spookxw Tenimgyet Malii
4. Gyologyet Luus 'Niist Amagyet Baskyalaxha 'WiiEelast
5. 'Niikyap 'WiiKagx Guuhadak Yagosip Xkwooxintxw Tsabux

1. The House of Xhliiyemlaxha.

2. Xhliiyemlaxha plus those Houses which have divided from Xhliiyemlaxha in the recent past.

3. Xhliiyemlaxha plus the Houses which divided from Xhliiyemlaxha in the recent past, plus the Houses with which Xhliiyemlaxha was once joined in the ancient past.

4. Xhliiyemlaxha plus the Houses whose members are currently located in Kispiox.

5. The entire Gitksan Wolf Clan.

Appendix 4
House-Clan-Village of Origin Lists

Different lists such as these might also be correct because houses divide and amalgamate over time.

The houses found on each page are currently located in the village named at the top. The houses listed under other village names lower down on each page have moved to the village named at the top.

Kispiox

Gisgaast	Lax Gibuu	Lax Seel
Geel	Xhliiyemlaxha	Delgamuuk
Dawamuux	'Wii Muug'ulsxw	Hagee
Gitluudaahlxw	Hawaa'w	Ma'os
Gutgwinuxs	Xsaxgyoo	Haaxw
Gwiiyeehl		
Ts'iibasaa	**Kaldo'o**	**Kisga'ga'as**
'Wii Seeks	Gyoluugyet	Meluulak
'Wiiget	Luus	'Wiiminoosik
Waiget	Amagyet	Wiisdis
	'Niist	
	Baskyalaxha	

Gitanmaax

Lax Seel	Lax Gibuu
Gyed'mgaldo'o	Spookxw
'Wiigoob'l	
Luutkuuts'iiwuus	**Kisga'ga'as**
Ts'ogoshlee	'Wii k'aax
Nikat'en	'Niik'yap
	Gwininitxw
	Guuhadakxw
	Anlaga'simdee'ix
	Xkwooyemtxw
	Ts'abax

Kitsegukla

Gisgaast	Lax Seel
Guxsan	Gwoogaloo'
Haxpeegwootxw	Haagasxw
Hanamuux	Duub'isxw
Xskoog'mlaxha	Gaxsgabaxs
'Wiiget	

Kitwangax

Ganada	Lax Gibuu	Lax Skiik
Lelt	T'enimgyet	Sakxwm Hiigook
Loolak		Simidiiks
Haakxw T'ewelasxw		
'Wii Hlengwax		Giilawa'
Haluus		

Kitwancool

Ganada	Lax Gibuu
K'amlaxyeltxw	Malii
Luuxoon	Gwas'hlam
Gunuu	'Wiilitsxw
Haita'imsxw	'Wiixa
T'ooxensxw	
Wutaxhayetsxw	
Yaxyak	

Appendix 5
Gitksan Kinship Terms

I do not claim that this is an exhaustive list. These are the kinship terms which I learned while undertaking the genealogical research. They sometimes conflict with the lists collected by Kasakoff (1984).

Nox	mother adopted mother step mother mother's sister mother's mother (affectionately) granddaughter (jokingly referring to reincarnation)
Ts'iits	grandmother any woman two generations older and related
Nibip	mother's brother father's sister's husband
Nigwoot	father adopted father
K'ahlaan	stepfather father's brother mother's sister's husband
Ye'e	grandfather any man two generations older and related
Nixtaa	father's sister mother's brother's wife
Hlgiikxw	sister (female speaker) adopted sister stepsister MZD, MMZDD, MMMZDDD, etc. father's brother's daughter

Gimxdii	sister (male speaker) adopted sister (female speaker) stepsister (female speaker) MZD, MMZDD, MMMZDDD, etc. (all matrilateral parallel cousins) brother (female speaker) (those of one's generation whom one cannot marry) father's brother's daughter
Guutga'oo	all cousins except matrilateral parallel ie.: MBC, FBC, FZC, MMBDC, MMZDC
Wak	brother (male speaker) adopted brother (male speaker) stepbrother (male speaker) MZS, MMZDS, MMMZDDS, etc. (all matrilateral parallel cousins) father's brother's son
Hlguxhl'm hanak	daughter adopted daughter stepdaughter sister's daughter (female speaker) brother's daughter (male speaker)
Gwislis'm hanak	sister's daughter (male speaker) brother's daughter (female speaker)
Hlguxhl'm gyet	son adopted son stepson sister's son (female speaker) brother's son (female speaker)
Gwislis'm gyet	sister's son (male speaker) brother's son (female speaker)
Naks	spouse

Guxdaa'gin	grandchild anyone two generations younger and related
Hlumxs	in-law

Appendix 6
Document List

These documents were used to gather genealogical information on the Gitksan:

Anglican Church Records
- Hazelton
  - Baptisms
    - 1886-1925
    - 1925-1955
  - Marriages
    - 1886-1940
    - 1887-1888
    - 1907-1909
    - 1910-1914
    - 1914
    - 1929-1949
  - Burials
    - 1903-1940
    - 1944-1955
- Kitwangax
  - Baptisms
    - 1889-1959
    - 1890=1899
    - 1899-1900
  - Marriages
    - 1896
    - 1889-1903
    - 1903--1933
  - Burials
    - 1889-1936
    - 1940-1963
- Kitwancool
  - Baptisms
    - 1928-1949
  - Burials
    - 1928-1949

1965 Band Lists
Kispiox
Glen Vowel
Gitanmaax
Kitsegukla
Kitwangax
Kitwancool
Hagwilget
Moricetown

1881 Census
Kuldo'o
Kisga'ga'as
Kispiox
Gitanmaax
Kitsegukla
Kitwangax
Kitwancool

1920 Indian Census
Kisga'ga'as
Kispiox
Glen Vowel
Gitanmaax
Kitsegukla
Meanskinisht
Kitwangax
Kitwancool
Hagwilget
Moricetown

1930 Indian Census
Kispiox
Glen Vowel
Gitanmaax
Kitsegukla
Meanskinisht
Kitwangax
Kitwancool
Hagwilget
Moricetown

Headstone Inscriptions
Gitanmaax
Kispiox

United Church Records (Kispiox, Gitanmaax, Kitsegukla)
- Baptisms
- Marriages
- Burials

1984 Band Lists
- Kispiox
- Glen Vowel
- Gitanmaax
- Kitsegukla
- Kitwangax
- Kitwancool

Neil Sterritt Name Lists

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n.d.c Temlaham: Land of Plenty. Unpublished. Canadian Museum of Civilization. Ottawa.

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